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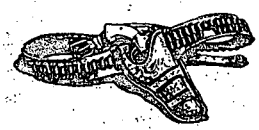

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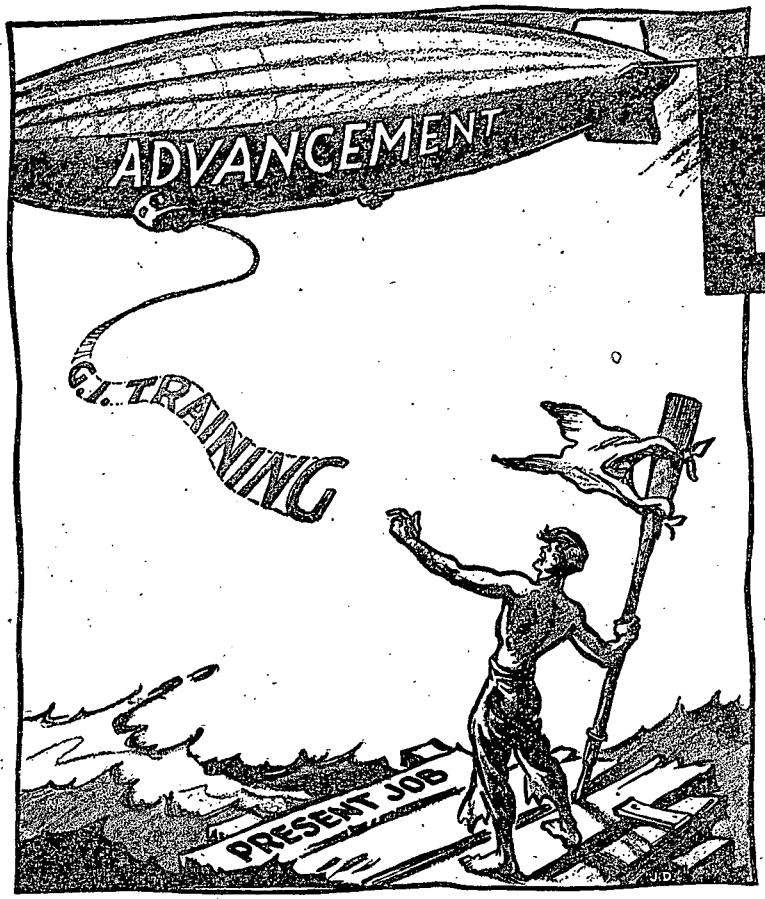

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VOLUME 11 NUMBER 9

All Stories Complete

INVASION OF THE PLANT MEN (Short Novel—25,000) ....by Berkeley Livingston 8
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Strange seeds took root on Earth, and grew into a menacing, alien horde . . .

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Who were these men who moved in a blur of speed too fast for the eye to see?

BACKWARD PASSAGE (Novelette—10,000) ..... by Lee Francis 68
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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

OUR COVER story for this month is in answer to a great number of requests from you readers, asking for a new Berkeley Livingston novel. We got right after Berk and told him he couldn't let his fans down that way. So Berk got busy and came through with a humdinger of a yarn. "Invasion of the Plant Men" is the story of an alien invasion of the Earth. Nothing new about that, you say? Well don't make up your mind before reading the story. Take it from us, it's a yarn in the Livingston tradition—which means you'll find plenty of action, suspense, and solid science-fiction background.

ROBERT GIBSON Jones, ace cover artist, read the story and said he'd like to do the cover. Naturally we said o.k. The result you've already seen. All we can say is, who could ask for more?

"LIGHTNING Loot" is Warren Kastel's latest offering for your reading pleasure. And the story has a neat angle to it that we think you'll like. It concerns a gang of bandits who devised a means of committing perfect crimes—in plain view of dozens of witnesses. How? Well, if you saw a robbery take place—but couldn't see the bandits themselves, well—and that's where we'll stop. You'll find out the answer when you read the story.

IT'S ALWAYS a pleasure to include Lee Francis' name on our contents page, for Lee is not only one of your favorite writers, but he never fails to present a swell stf yarn. This issue he returns with "Backward Passage" the story of a strange alley in the middle of a city block. It was easy enough to enter the alley and head for the other end—but you never could be sure if you'd reach it! And then one day a man staggered out of the alley—a man who had been dead for years! Was it possible that—but you'll find out for yourself when you turn to page 68 and start reading. And after you're finished, let us know how you liked it.

ROG PHILLIPS is still wearing his California suntan and says he is mighty glad to be home again. He arrived in town with a new story under his arm, and informed us quite modestly that he thought this one was really good. Well, we can't remember when Rog turned in anything but a good story, so we sat right down to read what he considered a *really* good yarn. After we finished "Incompatible" we knew what Rog had meant. And we'll go a little further and say we think it's not only good, but terrific! The main character in this story is an alien creature of super intelligence who lands on the Earth for only one thing: she is hungry and is looking for food. But that's where we're going to stop. We wouldn't want to spoil the story by telling you anything more. It's got plenty of suspense, and an ending that will leave you wondering...

"SECRET OF the Lightning" is by a new writer, H. H. Harmon. It's the story of a farmer who looked up from his plowing to see a man dashing down the side of a hill—being chased by a bolt of lightning! But that's only the beginning, for the lightning, lancing down from a clear sky, struck the man, and—that's enough to arouse your interest, we think. So go ahead, start reading.

HARRY GORDON is another new writer who came up with a swell yarn. "Gateway To Destruction" is the story of a terrible evil that engulfed mankind. And only one person held the power to destroy it. He had to make a grave decision then. For if he wiped out the menace, he would also have to destroy man along with it. What did he decide to do? The answer makes some mighty fine reading, so don't let us stop you.

FINISHING up the issue is a new short novel by Robert Moore Williams, one of your top favorites. In "The Magic of Joe Wilks" you'll read about a man who had one ambition in life—to be able to control the roll of dice in a gambling house. He got his wish all right, but that wasn't the only thing he got along with it. Bob combines suspense, drama, and good science-fiction to round out a swell yarn. See if you don't agree.

WHAT ABOUT next month? We've got some top-notch stories coming up, headed by a great new Alexander Blade story, "The Octopus of Space." There's a swell Arnold Kohn cover that goes with the story that we think you'll like too. And not only that, but the Reader's Page is back—at long last! So be sure and reserve your copy at your favorite newsdealer now. We'll be seeing you then.....WLH

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TELEVISION KITS

By LYNN STANDISH

Because of the great interest aroused by Mr. Standish's article "Roll Your Own" in a recent issue of FA, we are presenting a more detailed account of the subject . . .

THE EDITORS have been pleased by the overwhelming response and the tremendous interest shown in an article which appeared in a recent issue of *Fantastic Adventures*. The article was called "Roll Your Own" and concerned the construction of television receivers—a form of the radio hobby which is in a way, beginning to sweep across the country. It is interesting to consider the basis and origin of this kit-building idea. It stems from early radio.

Back in the days when radio was in its infancy, anyone who so desired could go out to a store, purchase the parts and with a little ingenuity and a few simple tools, construct his own radio receiver. At first it was the little, simple crystal set. Later on when the vacuum tube came into use, it was the one-tuber, then the tuned radio-frequency receiver, and at last the superheterodyne receiver. Gradually radio receivers were so simplified and so reduced in price that it hardly payed to construct one—at least for the average purpose. While even today radio receiver kits are available, the main buyers are hams, students, or those interested in especially high-quality equipment.

Television presented a considerably different picture when it finally came along. Like the early radios, all television sets are rather high-priced, starting at about a hundred and eighty dollars and ranging up to thousands of dollars. But outside of price the analogy with radio breaks down, for television sets are quite complicated and employ high frequencies, which means that the average man with a soldering iron and a pliers, simply can't go out to a radio equipment store, buy the parts and tubes and throw the set together. A television set requires careful engineering and skillful design so that it will operate properly. But there was an answer.

Television kits were prepared. These were effectively—or rather are—regular production line sets, unassembled. Everything has been carefully designed, carefully chosen for maximum efficiency. Thus, when the set is assembled according to the detailed instructions given with it, no difficulty should be experienced. Tubes, resistors, condensers, chassis, speaker, transformer, wire, lugs and a hundred and one other parts are provided in the right size and number. All that remains is to assemble and connect these parts together. Certain sections of the set are prepared beforehand, tuned and aligned so that no expensive instruments are needed.

The result is that anyone who is able to read, and who is able to learn the difference between a condensor and a resistor, who can learn the simple technique of soldering, can put one of these together. Close to two million regular television sets have been built and sold since the war—an additional thirty or forty thousand TV *kits* have also been sold, a tribute to the number of people who are willing to try to work out their own.

RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS, a sister publication of this magazine, regularly runs articles on kit construction and it contains numerous advertisements of the manufacturers who provide the standard television kits. It must be remembered too that TV kits range considerably in price. The point is, that the equivalent commercial TV set is a lot more expensive. It requires lots of labor to build a commercial set. A surprising benefit may be realized by buying one's own kit and assembling it. In every respect, practically, a home-built TV receiver will perform as well as a commercial job purchased in an appliance store.

Possibly, someday when TV sets come down in price, there will be little market for TV kits. But that time appears rather far off. Until then TV kits will fill a definite public need. In a recent issue of one of the popular monthly scientific magazines, an article appears in which the author, a complete amateur in radio, tells how he got up courage and bought, assembled and soldered together a TV set. He started with hesitation, but determination saw him through. It took him about fifty hours to slowly assemble the set making sure that each connection he made, was right. He says at the end of the article, that there is no thrill comparable to turning on the completed set and watching a picture form on the screen! The realization that you have put it there by your own labors, is quite a thrill!

So if you've got a little ambition, plenty of determination, and stick-to-ittiveness, you'll make out all right if you take the plunge and go into TV kit construction.

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INVASION of the

By BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

The tiny seeds landed on Earth and took root. The great invasion had begun . . .

"HEY, JEFF!"

The bald-headed man in the soiled bar apron looked toward the doorway, narrowing his eyes against the strong light which made a rectangular halo around the door, and tried to make out the figure framed by it.

The figure advanced closer, picked an empty stool close to the wall not too far from the door, and sat there grinning at Jeff.

Jeff's voice boomed a welcome. "Doc Gordon! What brings you to Los Cuevos?"

Ongren pointed to the plant creatures and Gordon stared in amazement—for they were alive! . . .

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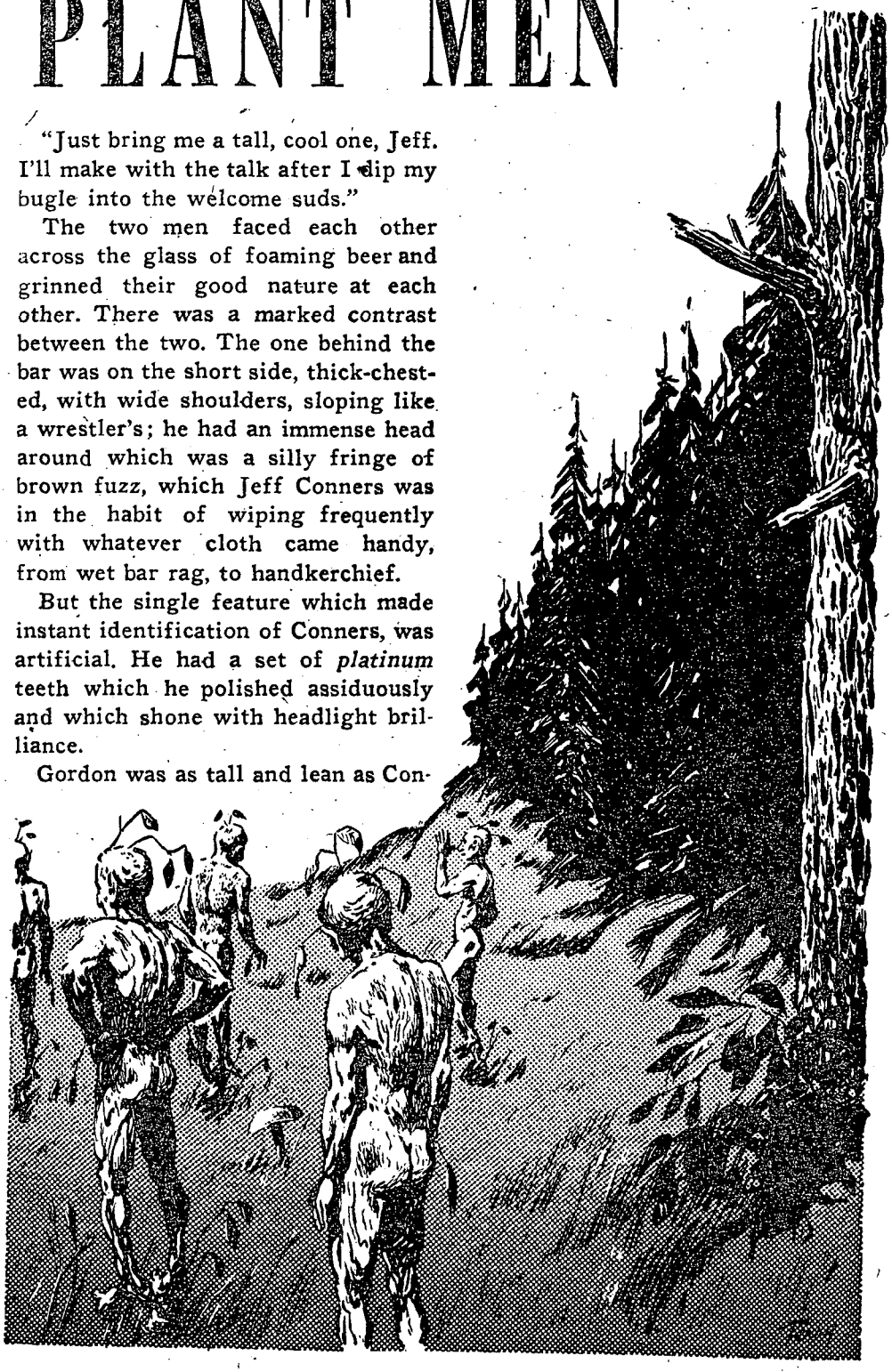
PLANT MEN

"Just bring me a tall, cool one, Jeff. I'll make with the talk after I dip my bugle into the welcome suds."

The two men faced each other across the glass of foaming beer and grinned their good nature at each other. There was a marked contrast between the two. The one behind the bar was on the short side, thick-chested, with wide shoulders, sloping like a wrestler's; he had an immense head around which was a silly fringe of brown fuzz, which Jeff Conners was in the habit of wiping frequently with whatever cloth came handy, from wet bar rag, to handkerchief.

But the single feature which made instant identification of Conners, was artificial. He had a set of *platinum* teeth which he polished assiduously and which shone with headlight brilliance.

Gordon was as tall and lean as Con-



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ners was short and thick. There was an athlete's leanness about him, as though he had once been one, and had never permitted himself to go to pot. He had a wide, high forehead, from which the hair was already starting to recede, though he wasn't an old man. His eyes were an indefinite grey, and they had a habit, especially when he was concentrating, of narrowing sharply and becoming ice blue in color. He was tanned to an almost bronze shade, which made his teeth seem unnaturally white. He would have been called handsome were it not for his smile. The smile made him look years younger; it was so boyish, so oddly twisted, giving the fine, mobile mouth an oddly humorous lift.

They faced each other for a few silent seconds, then Gordon quaffed the beer in a single gulp.

"Aah!" he sighed in satisfaction. "That hit the spot. Now draw me another, and we'll chin."

"Long time no see, Gordy," Jeff said, leaning his bulk on the polished walnut of the bar. "What brings you out here? Thought you were working out Los Alamos way?"

"Past tense, fella," Gordon said. "I'm on vacation."

"Homer Gordon vacationing! Don't make me laugh. You never took a vacation in your life."

"That, Jeff seems to be what's wrong."

"You sick?" Jeff asked, his voice suddenly concerned. "Hey!"

"No. Not yet. But the doc told me I was going to be if I didn't slow down. So I thought I'd come into Los Cuevos and see my old chum, Jeff Conners."

Conners heaved a sigh and turned his head and looked at a photograph which hung directly across the center of the bar, up above the first dollar he had taken in.

There were only two figures in the picture, and though the two men had changed considerably, they were still identifiable. The tall one had his arm around the shorter, heavier man. They were both in football uniforms. One was Gordon, the other, Conners.

Gordon said.

"They *were* the good, old days."

"Yep! Gordy Gordon, All-American half back, and Jeff Conners, All-American full back. Unanimous too. Wonder who's playing for old Backwash College now?" Jeff asked.

Gordon reminisced:

"The old fast one, and the taker-outer. I wouldn't have gone so far if it hadn't been for you, Jeff. You always were a great one for running interference. Even had to come out here, so you could be near me."

"Aah!" Conners was embarrassed. "What the hell! The old school pal. Couldn't just forget about him."

GORDON GRINNED in good feeling. It was the most wonderful thing in the world to have a friend like Jeff Conners.

"Yep," Conners went on. "They sure were the good old days. Look what came of them. Now Homer Gordon is a world famous man. Gets invited by the government to come out to Los Alamos to work..."

"On hush-hush stuff, Jeff," Gordon said. "But I wasn't the only one. There were many of us."

"Sure," Jeff said. "But I noticed who was boss man."

Gordon shook his head. He was thinking about the difference in position between them. Dammit! Jeff Conners deserved more than this wayside tavern in the New Mexico desert. Gordon said so.

"Nuts, Gordy! I'm just a lug. Yep. Even in school. You and I know the only reason I got through, was be-

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cause I was one hell of a good football player. But never mind that. Let's get back to you. So you're a sick man, eh? Which takes care of the tourist folders, telling what a spa New Mexico is..."

"Now, now, Jeff. 'Tain't so. Never felt better, physically, in my life. But the old brain's a little tired. That's why the doc recommended a change of scene."

"Y'know, Gordy," Jeff said reflectively. "That doc's a sensible man. We *both* need a change of scenery. Give me an hour and a half and I'll be with you."

"Hold on, Jeff!" Gordon said. "I'm the one who needs a vacation. Besides, you just can't close up, just like that..."

"I can't! Just watch old Jeff," the other said.

He moved around the bar, taking a placard from a drawer, as he came around to the front. He stepped to the door, and hung the sign up, so that it was instantly to be seen. The card read, Closed. Gone fishing.

"Put it there," Jeff said, as he walked to the back room, removing his apron as he did so, "every time I go fishing. And that's where I'm going now."

"But look, Jeff," Gordon expostulated, "I haven't the slightest idea where I'm going..."

"So the fish took longer to bite than I thought," Jeff said, disposing in simple fashion, the other's arguments. "Be out in a couple minutes..."

Gordon looked along the length of the bar. At the far end, three Mexican laborers were sitting. There was a bottle of cheap Mezcal at one's elbow, and in the center, a shallow bowl of light-green peppers. The bottle was passed between them, and as they poured a drink, they would reach into the bowl, take a pepper, bite into it and swallow the strong condiment with a swallow of Mezcal.

The Mexicans were the only customers in the place.

In a short time Conners reappeared. He was lugging a couple of suitcases. He stopped by the Mexicans, and in a bull-like bellow said:

"Okay, *hombres*. Closing time."

They turned startled faces to him and he continued:

"Vamoose! Scram. Here, take the bottle along. Beat it."

He followed them to the door, closed it on them and turned to Gordon.

"Y'know, Gordy, those Mex's ain't bad eggs. They can sit like that for hours. Just give them Mex music, peppers and Mezcal, and they're happy. An' if they ever have an argument, they take it outside, and settle it. I like them!"

"I guess they like *you* too," Gordon said. "Ready?"

"Let's go."

CONNERS lifted the trunk cover and shoved his bags in beside those of Gordon. He came around to the front, eased his bulk into the seat and said:

"How come you were all set to leave, and stopped by? Main highway's a couple miles over."

"Well," Gordon hemmed, looking straight ahead. "I—I thought I'd stop by and say so-long to a pal..."

Conners grinned at the strong profile and said:

"Nice going, pal. I get it. And like it. Okay, feed the heap the gas and let's get places. An' by the way, got any idea where we ought to head for?"

Gordon shrugged his wide, lean shoulders and said:

"Don't make much difference to me. I thought we'd get in some fishing. How'd you like the California coast?"

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"Nah!" Conners was emphatic in his dislike. "Too many *touristas.*"

"Okay, then. Where'll it be?"

"Say! How about the Flambeau, up in Wisconsin?"

"Swell! Except that at this time of the year, there are more fishermen than there are fish."

"H'm. So where does that leave us?"

Gordon spent the next half hour in concentration on driving over the gravel road. But now that they had started, he *did* wonder where they were going. He didn't relish the thought of going anywhere where there were people. He wanted solitude and the company of this man beside him. But where was it to be found? And quite suddenly, he knew where he wanted to go.

"Look, Jeff," he said. "Remember when we played that small college up there a hundred or so miles from Green Bay?"

"Yeah."

"Well, we went fishing out there; boy was it cold. There was that large island out in the lake. Remember?"

The island and the fishing came back in a rush to Conners.

"Yeah! Sure! They had the biggest perch out there I've ever seen. And there weren't too many people. I think we got it, Gordy."

There was a fly in the ointment, however. It settled on the tip of Conners' brain.

"Yeah," Conners went on. "That island sure would be the spot. Only it's up in Wisconsin. And even with the two of us drivin' it would take us three days to get there... And three days back. Don't sound like much of a trip..."

"Why?" Gordon asked. "Do you have to be back in a specified time?"

"Not me! The joint c'n go scratch, for all I care. It's you I'm thinkin' about."

"So stop worrying," Gordon said. "This is going to be a real vacation. I can take as long as I want to. The hard work out at Los Alamos is over. The military and the civilians can fight for control and break their heads over it for all I care."

Of course, Conners, like the rest of the country, was no longer in the dark about Los Alamos. And like the others, knew almost as little as before. A natural stirring of curiosity made him ask:

"What's going on there, now?"

Gordon smiled, but grimly. He knew all too well what was going on. But he wasn't in any position to tell. He shook his head, and said:

"There's going to be one taboo on this trip. Los Alamos. Sorry, Jeff. It's still hush-hush."

CHAPTER II

The Island

GORDON GRINNED in good feel- the strait from Adam's Island. A driving rain, made slanting by a strong wind, had raised a mist which shrouded the island in mystery. Now and then a fog horn sounded its eerie call, and the birds echoed in hawking cry. The two men standing on the shore, shielded their eyes against the rain and looked across the water. A beam of yellowed light stabbed the darkness. It was the lighthouse on the island.

"Now ain't that a hell of a note," said the stocky man. "We come all the way from New Mexico just to get some fishing in and all it does is rain for the past two days."

The tall, lean one in the yellow slicker, said:

"Don't worry, Jeff. It'll let up. Stockton swore on his word as the best weather prophet in this section,

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that tomorrow will bring sunshine."

"From his mouth to God's ear," Jeff said. "Well, might as well go back to the cabin. Fred Allen'll be on in a couple minutes."

DOCTOR Horog sat deeper in the chair. His thick-lensed glasses threw off shallow facets of light, as he turned to peer near-sightedly at his companion. Horog had a round head, completely devoid of hair. His forehead showed unusual proportions, being very much higher and wider than the circumference of the head warranted. His eyes were deep-set and small, and were shadowed by immense eyebrows, of tufted, jet-black hair. He had a thick, red-veined nose, under which was a slit mouth.

His companion was another story.

James Ongren would have been termed beautiful had he been a woman. Everything physical about him, was arranged, it seemed, with the express purpose of giving visual pleasure. He was tall, leanly-muscular. He was yet so finely proportioned that neither his height or leanness seemed to be noticed. But if one didn't notice height or weight, one instantly saw the face. It was the face of an angel or devil! He was sitting profile to Horog, and Ongren's features seemed carved from a marble that was more than life-like. For an odd instant, Horog thought it was marble, so still was the other. Then Ongren turned full face to the other and said:

"Beastly night, isn't it?"

Horog shook his head up and down twice, then reached for his pipe and pouch on the low table in front of his chair.

Ongren went on:

"It's pleasant, sitting here before an open fire watching the flames. Probably one of the nicest things I can think of. A fire, a drink and the companionship of man."

Horog grunted something, and the other's eyebrows moved toward his hairline.

"Were you about to say something?" Ongren asked.

Horog cleared his throat, spat phlegm into the fire, and said:

"Yes. But it doesn't matter."

"No? Perhaps not. But go on, Doctor. Have your say."

"Well, then. We have been here for three weeks. I like fishing. You have a very nice place here, with almost all the conveniences of a more urban life. Yet now I find myself asking, what is the reason for my being here?"

"That, my dear Doctor, was a question you should have asked when you received the ten thousand dollars I sent," Ongren said.

"True," said the other, but grudgingly. That money... H'm. Perhaps it were better he didn't inquire into motives...? But the itch of curiosity had to be scratched. "I did agree to come. Nor did I ask too deeply of myself the reason..."

"Perhaps the thought of the ninety thousand dollars which I promised you," Ongren continued, "helped assuage any pains of conscience which might have arisen in your breast? I imagine so. Wait. Since we *have* begun this talk, perhaps it were best that we go on.

"I did not pick your name from a hat. It was after the most deliberate of meditations, that I selected your name. I assure you, my dear Doctor, that yours, is a signal honor. And that the future will remember, if not with delight, then with other emotions, your contribution to it.

"Now why, you might ask, was it necessary to deliberate so? A reason-

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able question. Only the answer is going to be a bit mysterious.

"I needed a bio-chemist. And you Doctor Horog were the man I chose."

HOROG sat forward, the eyes behind the thick lenses narrowed even more than was their natural wont. Although he had been a guest for three days, it was the first time his host had uttered words of more than passing interest and of bearing on the matter of Horog's visit. For that had been the word used in Ongren's communication.

"Interesting," Horog made comment. "But why me? Surely in this great land there were others, of perhaps greater ability or knowledge?"

"On the contrary there were none. Although the government thought so."

Horog flushed. What Ongren said was true. He had heard, from the source common to all scientists, that the government was more than interested in certain experiments dealing with phases of chemistry which Horog had prided himself on being an expert. Yet though he had waited, patient in the thought he was sure to be called, nothing had happened. It was as if the government had never heard of him. It wasn't till later he had discovered the reason for its coldness.

Although a citizen, Horog had not been born in the country. And although the country from which he'd come was not an enemy country at any time, its people were considered alien, un-American, and unfit for public office, or for holding responsible positions.

That was the reason, and the only reason Horog had not been selected. A natural resentment, which later developed into something akin to hatred, was born on Horog's mind. He shut himself up, and having an income which was more or less private and not dependant on others, was able to continue his experiments without hindrance. But the slight accorded him rankled deep.

The perfectly shaped lips of Ongren parted in an odd smile. It was as if he was reading Horog's mind.

"However," Ongren went on, "though the authorities thought little of you, I thought a great deal. And despite the fact I was able to pick and choose, I did not hesitate in asking you."

"Thank you," Horog said in his precise manner. There was, despite the formality of the words, an odd warmth and gratitude in the tone. Here was one, at least, who acknowledged his greatness. But, it seemed to Horog, they had departed from the path. "Er, Ongren. You were going to tell me..."

"Of course. But I think I will wait until tomorrow. This rain is going to let up. Then I will *show* you my little project."

"The rain," Horog said. "A pity. It's such a beautiful island. Quite popular, too."

"Too much so. But after tomorrow it won't be," Ongren said. "It was quite impossible for me to notify everyone. There are the ferry people, the ones who have the Manly Harbor run; it's on the other side of the island and I didn't have the time to let them know..."

"You mean *you* own this island?" Horog asked in surprise.

"Yes. Complete to lighthouse and fishing stream. Cost quite a sum, too. But money is of small consideration to me. But by noon, all the men I hired will have arrived and we can get to work, unhindered by the curious, and unfettered by convention."

"Good!" Horog said emphatically.

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"I feel the urge to work. And though these past few days have been a good rest for me, I have always chaffed under inactivity."

Ongren smiled and said:

"No need to worry about that. May even be too much of work."

"Not for me," Horog replied.

But there was enigma in Ongren's answering smile.

F'R THE love of heaven!" Gordon exclaimed. "What's the idea of the arsenal? We're not going on a *hunt*!"

Conners looked down at the crossed rows of belts, filled with cartridges, and grinned up at his companion.

"I hear," he said, "that they have some pretty big ones out there. Well, I ain't going to let the big ones get away. That's why little Eva, here," he patted the .38 in the holster on his hip, "is going along too. She got to have food, y'know."

Gordon shook his head in wonderment, and bent over his gear again. He made a careful check of it, nodded his head in satisfaction; Stockton, the owner of the cabin in which they'd stayed the past three days, had promised them enough food to last several days should they stay over and not want to go to one of the resorts on the island.

"Ready, fellas?" a hoarse voice asked.

They turned and saw Stockton, a tall, rangy man, in faded corduroy trousers, and grimed shirt, standing at their shoulders. He was grinning down at them.

"Never seed such fellas f'r fishin'," he said. "Gosh a'mighty! Well, come along, then. I got the boat ready. Save a couple hours, anyway. Ferry don't leave till ten."

"Which means," Jeff said with a satisfied leer, "we're gonna beat the others to the fish."

Stockton had a thirty-footer which he used for lake fishing. But Gordon made it worth the man's while for Stockton to take them across. Ten miles of water separated mainland from island. Stockton helped stow their gear aboard, and it didn't take long before the motor was running over and white water was ahead, and their wake was foaming behind.

"All right, fellas. Now you get your bearings, and I'll pick you up, in three-four days. Right?" Stockton said, as he slowly moved off shore.

Gordon, however, was peering into the glare of the water. A small power cruiser had just slipped into an inlet not far from where Stockton had let them off. Gordon was sure he had seen two people on board, a man and a woman. He shrugged his shoulders and smiled to himself. He must be getting old, he thought, to bother about other people. He turned to Stockton who was waiting a reply to his question.

"Yeah. That's right. Make it *four* days. Right here," Gordon said.

Stockton grinned and gave the motor full power. "Nice fellers," he thought, as he gave his attention to the boat. "Nice fellers."

BUT Art Oleson had other thoughts, as he surveyed the burly group of men waiting to board the ferry. "Look like a gang of strike-breakers I once seed in Detroit, only bigger. Won'er what they're going up to the point f'r?"

There were twenty-four of them including one who seemed to be their leader. At least he gave the orders, and paid Art his money. And he supervised the bringing on board of a dozen wooden boxes. Art made it a

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point to heft one of the boxes when no one was looking, and his eyes widened at the weight. He wondered what sort of machinery was in them.

* * *

Gordon waved a last good-bye to Stockton, then turned to Jeff and said:

"Might as well get this stuff out of our way, Jeff. Let's go."

Jeff bent and shouldered both packs, and though their combined weight was well over a hundred pounds, he lifted them as though they contained feathers. Gordon carried their fishing equipment. The forest, mostly pines, with now and then a spruce and fir breaking in among the others, stretched before them: There was the faint indentation of a narrow path directly ahead.

They walked for a little better than a hundred yards, before Gordon spotted a small glade which would serve the purpose he had in mind.

"This is it, Jeff," he said, using his head to point. "That spruce ahead'll do."

Jeff carried the packs to the tree which Gordon said was the one, and dropped it. He looked up and saw the closest branch was at least fifteen feet from the ground, too high for any small animal to reach. There were no large animals on the island.

Gordon watched the other tie the straps of one pack to his shoulder, and shinny up the tree. He marveled at the strength of the other. In a few seconds, Jeff came down and brought the other pack up. He was only slightly winded when he came down the second time.

"Guess they'll be safe up there," Jeff said.

"So let's go fishing," Gordon said.

Stockton had told them of a particular stream about midway on the island. There was only the difficulty of reaching it, for it lay between the two largest hills and that part of it where the trout swam was in the midst of a tangled growth of brush. It took the two men an hour and a half of fighting through the brush to come to it. But after the first ten minutes of wading the rushing water, and making their first cast, they were content. For with the first cast, came the first bite.

From then on it was a battle between fish and men, and more often than not, the fish made the grade.

At last, just as the sun was going down, they took the last of the legal catch, cast them ashore, and headed for the bank. In a short while, Jeff had the fish cleaned, and ready for the pan. Gordon, in the meantime, made the fire ready.

"Now this is what I call the life," Jeff said contentedly, as he washed the last of the fish down with hot coffee.

"But Jeff," Gordon said. "You haven't used little Eva."

"Don't worry, pal, old pal. She'll be going to work. We're not going to spend all our time trout fishing."

"Come morning," Gordon said, "we'll head for the river. Muskies are what I'm after. There's nothing like a Muskie for a good fight. Now don't get me wrong," he hastened to add, as Jeff raised an objection. "I like trout casting. But that's the trouble. You cast first. And if it isn't a good one, why you might as well forget about it. So the art of trout fishing depends on one's skill as a caster. Uh, uh. Not for me. I like to throw out the line and get those big ones biting."

"Good old, Gordy," Jeff said. "Always taking the words out of my mouth."

GORDON looked at the other in astonishment. He had been certain

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Jeff was about to argue the point. Now this. He grinned wryly at the other, and took up the pan and their tableware, and started for the river. Jeff followed, still talking Muskies.

The light was mellowing and where it filtered through the trees on the opposite shore, there was an unearthly glow about it. Gordy paused and let his eyes have their fill of it. Then he bent and began to rinse the tinware.

"Well. Will you take a gander at that!" Jeff said in a low, pleased voice.

Gordon looked up to where Jeff's eyes were lifted, and stood erect in astonishment.

There was a man and woman, both in waders, casting along the shore among the small rushes which grew there. They were about thirty yards upstream and moving away from where Gordon and his friend were watching. Suddenly the girl's pole bent. She had a strike!

For the next few minutes there was a battle royal, watched not alone by the man with her, but also by Gordon and Jeff. And in the end she won. There was an involuntary bellow of joy from Jeff. But the fenzied cry of gladness choked up in Jeff's throat and was succeeded by a look of consternation. The girl had brought the net in under the fish, suspended on the line. And just as she started to bring the net up over the squirming trout, Jeff bellowed.

That did it!

Her face came up, and although she was too far to be seen clearly, Gordon imagined the look of fright at the sudden sound. And what was worse, the fright made her lose control of the line, and the trout hit the water with a silvery splash. A wild lunge and the slender line snapped.

The two men couldn't hear what words the girl was using, but they weren't pleasant ones, from what her actions showed. She was hopping up and down in a wild frenzy, at the end of which she flung the steel pole from her and started toward Gordon and Jeff, her companion following and obviously trying to calm her.

"You idiots!" the words came to them before she was within reaching distance. "Oh you darn, fools! Fishermen! Nuts!"

Gordon and Jeff backed up from the fury in the female version of the male fishing cap, whose blond tresses, escaping from the confines of the cloth, made a wondrous waterfall of tumbling gold. She had a narrow, wide-browed face. Her eyes were wide-set and amber, and at that moment, snapping in fury. The two men were too busy trying to get away from the girl to pay any attention to the man, who was obviously upset by the whole business, and was pulling vainly at the girl and murmuring in low tones that she ought to forget it.

"Well. Don't just stand there! Say something," the girl demanded.

"What," Gordon said, "is there to say? Except that Jeff and I are sorry it happened."

"You? Why should you be sorry? That big, fat lug with you is the one who should be sorry."

Gordon's lean, slightly saturnine features lost their pleasant look. This beautiful girl was something of a shrew. True, she had a reasonable complaint. But Jeff hadn't meant anything by his shout. Come to think about it, had her hearing been a little more acute, she would have appraised the yell for what it was worth. But the girl didn't know what Gordon was thinking. And she kept on with her tirade.

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"Well, say something!" she said, and suddenly took a few quick steps which brought her face to face with Jeff.

Jeff backed away, stumbled against a log, and fell flat on his back. The look of anger faded from her face at sight of the huge man on the ground, his legs kicking wildly as they tried to reach a more normal position and failing in their attempt.

The three men, including the one on the ground started to laugh and the girl joined in. Gordon and the girl's companion helped Jeff to his feet.

"I'm sorry, miss," Jeff said. "But I was so plumb glad to see you hook that baby, I guess the excitement was too much for me."

"I know what you mean," she said. "I suppose I can't really blame you. But," she continued in a pensive note, "I sure would have been a mighty pleased gal to have landed him."

FOR THE first time, Gordon noticed that the man was carrying their creels with him, and from the looks of the wicker baskets, they hadn't had any luck. No wonder the girl was so peeved. Gordon thought of the fish lying in their bed of ferns there behind them, and instantly made his mind up to invite these two to share in their catch.

The man accepted without an instant's hesitation, and the girl followed her companion's lead only after the smallest pause for thought.

Their names were Daryl and Sam Winthrop, and they were first cousins.

"...Sam had been raving about the fishing up here," the girl said in between swallows of coffee and bites of fish. "So, since I had a week to spare I thought I'd tag along. We're staying on the mainland, in a resort..."

"So're we," Jeff said. "At Stockton's."

Only Gordon seemed to have noticed that the sun was no longer with them and that it had become quite dark. He mentioned it.

"Oh. We have our sleeping bags with us," the girl said.

"Which reminds me, Daryl," Sam said. "We'd better be trotting along." He rose with the words, lifted his pan and started for the stream.

"Well, thanks awfully for the dinner," Daryl said. "And I promise not to blow my top again, if ever I let another get away in similar circumstances."

A wonderful idea presented itself to Gordon.

"Look!" he said. "We're spending the night out, too. Matter of fact, we're staying a couple of days. Why not let's all camp together?"

The two Winthrops looked at each other, nodded their heads in silent agreement, and the man took the lead:

"It's okay with us. We've got our bags down the stream a bit. I'll pick them up. Daryl, you stay here."

The girl and Gordon washed the dishes again, while Jeff cleared the ground of any stray fire. By the time they had done with what they were doing, Sam returned bearing his and the girl's gear.

"Well, come along, then," Gordon said. We've reserved a fine place..."

And ten miles, at the most northerly point of the island, in a house that was like a palace, two men sat by a fire and plotted.

"YOU ARE going to run into trouble," Horog said.

"But foreseen trouble," Ongren said. "There's a difference, you know.

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The balance of the men arrived today, and with them, their *materials.*" He smiled bleakly at the word. "I had intended to notify those whom I hadn't previously, to leave. But we took so much time in looking the project over..."

"It was worth it," Horog said enthusiastically. "I never dreamed..."

Ongren looked at the other through narrowed lids. Horog would serve his purpose. He had already made plans for the disposal of the man. First, however, Horog had his work to do.

"Nor did anyone else, I assure you," Ongren said. "Certainly not those who released the first atom bomb. Nor those who let loose the last, either. Only I saw it."

"But how? Where?" Horog asked.

Ongren smiled again, and suddenly Horog felt a shiver rise in him. It was an involuntary shudder, nor could he say why.

"I saw it, and it doesn't matter where. What matters is that I saw it. Little plants blooming suddenly. Little man plants. I took them from their native soil and nurtured them, and found another soil where they would grow. Here, on Adam's Island. The only other place in the world. But I wasn't a sufficient scientist. You are. Now we can work together, for the ends of science, of course, to show the world what a marvelous thing we have found."

The furrowed crease between Horog's brow deepened suddenly at the other's words. There was something strange about them. Horog was sure that Ongren had no desire to do things for the sake of science. He was too cold-blooded a man. He was too... Too what? And with the question there came the realization that he knew nothing of the motives of Ongren, the functions which made a man do things, desire things. He gave Ongren a narrowed, sidelong glance.

The handsome face showed him nothing. Only the lips, parted, to show perfect teeth, upcurled in a smile. Ongren went on:

"...There is only the question of *how*. Shall we let loose a blight of our beings? Shall we let them grow to the heights they are capable of? How will they be received? It is indeed a sore problem."

But there was that smile on the mouth and the coldness in the eyes to belie the worried tone.

"That," Horog said, as he reached for an ash tray, "is a problem which must take its turn. The problem of absolute privacy is our more important problem."

The ash tray was a little beyond his reach, and Ongren picked it up and started to hand it to the other. But somehow, just as Horog's fingers touched it, it slipped and shattered on the table top. Splinters of glass flew about and one of them buried itself deep into Ongren's thumb. The tall man looked at the gleaming bit of glass and calmly pulled it loose.

HOROG looked at him with wide eyes. There hadn't been the smallest change of expression in the man's face or eyes, yet Horog knew that there had been exquisite torture in the business of pulling the sliver loose from the flesh.

Ongren rose and said:

"Better get something to clear off the mess. Clumsy of me."

He returned in a few seconds with a small dustpan and proceeded to sweep the glass fragments and dust into the pan. When he was through the table top was clean. Not even the smallest speck of dust disturbed its surface.

Ongren emptied the pan's contents into a wastebasket close-by and re-

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sumed his seat.

"You're right about that," he said, resuming the conversation from the point they had left it when the accident happened. "I've already told my men to start getting those who are still on the island, off."

"About how many are there?" Horog asked.

"Twenty, thirty. I don't know exactly. But by noon they'll all be on the mainland."

"And suppose some decide not to move?"

"One way or another," Ongren said, "they'll go."

There was no question of an implied threat. It stuck out like a sore thumb, Horog thought, and looked at Ongren's. It should have been sore. Not even a redness marked where the glass had entered.

"By the way," Horog asked, "have any of them showed a curiosity about what's going on?"

"But of course. They wouldn't be human if they hadn't. They didn't get far, I assure you. Matter of fact those who did received short shrift at the hands of my men."

"That wasn't too smart."

Ongren shrugged his wide shoulders. "Who cares what they think?" he said. "I just want them out of the way."

"And what about those on the mainland?" Horog asked.

"No different. They, as a matter of fact, caused me more trouble than the ones on the island. There are so many inlets that it seemed almost impossible to keep them out. That's why I got so many guards. Three hundred men is a small army.

"Y'know. They are somewhat like an army, a specialized army. Hah, hah! Very good. A specialized army."

Horog wondered what was so funny about the remark. And yet... He looked into his mind's eye and saw again those who had come from the ferry. They seemed to have an odd similarity of appearance, a sameness of expression, sullen, yet vacuous, empty. Even their eyes. And once more the shudder shook Horog.

"Well," Ongren said with a wide yawn. "Might as well get to bed. Tomorrow brings a new day and new enterprise."

CHAPTER III

"...You'd Better Leave"

THE THREE men and the girl plodded slowly up the side of the steep hill. Only the girl was unencumbered with gear, the men carrying loads of one sort or another. At last they reached the rounded peak and found seats on the bare ground.

"Wow!" Jeff exclaimed. "That was work."

"Um, h'm," Gordon said. "But look!" he pointed down to the bay below.

It was an exciting scene. The water of the lake, white-capped and wavy, was bluer than anything they'd ever seen, and clear as crystal A small boat rocked at anchor near the shore. A half dozen cabins, in a half moon around a central lodge, lay a bare fifty feet off the beach. And behind the cabins and lodge, the forest, pine, fir and spruce, lay thick and green.

"Is that the place, Sam?" Gordon asked.

"Yep. Fella down in Greenpoint told me that Jepson, the owner, has fine accomodations, and what's more important, has the fightingest lake trout in all Wisconsin."

"They'd better be," Jeff said. "You

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talked us out of going for them Muskies."

"You won't be sorry," Sam said, and turned to his cousin.

But she was looking sideways at the tall, lean Gordon, who wasn't aware of the hidden glance and was still looking down at the cluster of cabins. Gordon shook his head and said:

"Might as well get down and get settled."

The scramble down the gentle slope was a lot less tiring than the long climb up, and faster. In a matter of minutes they were striding across the pebble-strewn beach toward Jepson's. The strangeness struck all of them. This was the month of June. Yet the place seemed deserted.

They passed the first of the cabins. It was empty. So was the last. As they walked up the graveled pathway leading to the main lodge a dog came from around the side and raised a row, barking and growling at their approach. The girl called to him, and he stopped growling only to continue his barking, but this time it was on a friendly note.

The dog trotted alongside Daryl for the last few feet before they reached the wide steps leading to the main lodge. But they didn't go up. Once more they were assailed by that feeling of emptiness. Only this time they were wrong.

Quite suddenly the door opened a crack, enough so that whoever was behind it could see without being seen. The four stopped in their tracks. There was something ominous in that opened door. As though the person behind it was satisfied with what he saw, the door swung wide, and three men stepped out onto the veranda-like porch.

Two of them carried rifles crooked in their elbows, and the third had a pair of pistols holstered on his hip.

"Sorry folks," said the tallest of the three. "Thought it was somebody else. Come in."

"Sure it's all right?" Gordon asked hesitantly, looking meaningfully at the armament.

The man smiled thinly. "Yep. Just thought it might be a skunk we're expectin'. It's all right.

"Name's Jepson," said the man, as he accompanied Gordon and the others into a wide, high-ceilinged room which was the lobby, and from the amount of summer furniture scattered about, the leisure room. The latter conclusion was borne out by a few slot machines in one corner and several tables which could have been used for fun. A small bar opened off one side, and at the far end, folding doors opened to a veranda.

"Set folks," Jepson said. "Maw'll bring some coffee in ...unless you want stronger stuff?"

ONLY JEFF showed an interest. But he knew enough to follow Gordon's lead. It was odd how they all suddenly accepted, without discussion, the command of the lean scientist.

The two men, though it was apparent they had barely come into their manhood, the sons of Jepson, stalked into another room leading into the kitchen. As they passed from the lobby the father called after them:

"Tell maw we got visitors, an' have her fix somethin' warm."

Jepson wasn't one of those reticent people. He liked to talk and if there was an audience, so much the better. Gordon and the others proved an excellent audience.

"It's like this," Jepson said. "We was expectin' some other people come to call on us. That's why the artillery.

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Seems like we got notice to move, a week back. An' me, maw and the kids just ain't goin' to do it.

"Fust of all, this land belongs to us. My father's father was brought up on it, an' it's come all the way down the line to my sons, an' I hope to their sons. But when hard times hit us a few years back I had to mortgage the land.

"I been payin' it off. True, I'd miss a payment now and then, but Harkness, over to Greenpoint, who is the broker, wouldn't mind. Well, I missed last payment. An' when I came to town a couple weeks back to clear it up, I found Harkness wasn't no longer the broker. Some man named, Ongren, had took over. Wouldn't honor my payment. Said I'd lapsed. Said I'd have to get off *his* property. Said he'd make me if I didn't.

"That's why the artillery, folks."

"H'm," Gordon was noncomittal. "It looks like this Ongren has a perfect legal right to his property, Mister Jepson. Not much you can do about it."

"Mebbe," Jepson said. "Only I don't like snaky tricks. An' this was one. I don't like this Ongren, whoever he might be. He's been buyin' property right and' left. Guess he owns the whole darned island by now..."

Gordon's head went up. Something was wrong. Either this man was suffering from a persecution complex or...

"Stockton didn't say anything about it to us," Gordon said.

"I'll bet!" Jepson said. "Stockton's a shrewd bugger. When you came to him, you said you wanted to fish Adam's Island, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"So he figgered he'd let you come over. He's got some cottages over to Jollison's Bay. He knew you'd be back..."

"Well. He said he'd pick us up," Gordon explained.

"Yep. An' knowin' about the patrols, he knew you wouldn't get far. So this way he gets rental on the boat an' gear, an' when you get back with no fish, why he'd rent a cottage out to his place. Shrewd bugger."

"What's this about patrols?" Gordon asked.

"This Ongren's bought out the whole island, I guess. An' he's got men walkin' beat all over the place. He don't want no one on his property. Only he'll have to come an' get us off."

"Oh! That's a shame!" Daryl exclaimed. It was evident where her sympathy lay.

"True," Gordon said. "But Ongren's got the law on his side."

"I don't care," she said. "Sometimes there's too much of law. A man has other rights besides lawful ones."

BUT GORDON was several thoughts ahead of her. If what Jepson said was true, then they'd better get back to the mainland. He had no desire to get mixed up in a brawl which didn't concern him. He finished the last of the coffee and rose to his feet. Jeff followed.

"I'm sorry about that, Jepson," he said. "But I think we'd better be on our way."

"Not me!" the girl said emphatically. "I'm staying!"

"Daryl!" Gordon looked at her sharply. "That's childish."

"Gordon's right," Sam said.

Even Jeff agreed.

But she was adamant. "I'm staying. Just to see what sort of character this Ongren is!"

Gordon made light of it, trying to

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dissuade her:

"He won't come in person. Those kind of people never do. I'll bet he sends his underlings out."

"And besides," Sam added, "what good will your staying do?"

"Maybe none," the girl said. "But I..."

Only the dog gave warning. He had been lying quietly at Jepson's feet. Suddenly the hackles rose and he got to his feet, growling deep in the back of his throat. But Gordon noticed that it was a sound of fear.

They all looked to the door. It opened slowly, and three men walked in.

Gordon's eyes narrowed in thoughtful concentration at sight of them. There was something peculiar about them. Something machine made, like robots. Yet it was an inexplicable feeling. For in a greater sense, they acted like men.

Two of them stood to either side of the open door, as if on guard. The third walked forward until he was confronting Jepson. This one was neither tall or short, wide or narrow, heavy or light. There was an odd neutrality about him. Even the skin and dress were neutral. And that characteristic extended even to his voice:

"Jepson?"

Jepson didn't answer; his eyes were centered in a frightening concentration on a spot just below the other's left breast. It was as if he was sending through his mind's eye, a bullet straight into that spot. Again the dull, emotionless voice asked if he was Jepson. This time there was an answer:

"Yep. What you want?"

"I have orders for you," the man said. He said it as if he had memorized the words. "This place is no longer yours. You must leave at once."

"And if we don't?" Jepon asked. There wasn't the slightest change of expression in the other's face as he answered:

'I have told you what to do. You'd better leave..."

"Look, mister," Jepson said, shifting the rifle from the crook of his elbow to a more menacing place. "See this?"

A hint of a smile parted the thin lips of the stranger.

"Yes."

"It's liable to go off, mighty sudden, see. An' I ain't gonna be responsible for anything what comes of its goin' off. I don't know who sent you. But you c'n go back and tell him we're stayin' till Hell freezes over."

The stranger turned on his heel and marched to the door. The two at the door stepped smartly through, with the automatic precision of trained soldiers. But the last turned before stepping through and said:

"...You'd better leave."

He smiled his thin-lipped smile, and continued on his way.

THERE WAS a sound like a squeal and Jepson's sons sped in pursuit. They were stopped by the old man's voice just as they reached the door:

"Hold on, boys!"

They looked to their father, who continued: "Ain't no use chasin' them. Besides, they're just messengers. We want the guy behind them, their boss. He's the one I'd like to meet up with."

"Frankly," came an unexpected voice, "so would I."

Jeff's chin fell as he turned to Gordon who had spoken. Even Gordon had a hint of surprise in his eyes. He hadn't meant to take sides.

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But that mechanical voice and commanding manner had gotten under his skin. What right had any man to talk like that, even if he were in the right?

"I don't know what they intend doing. But I don't have any doubts but that they are quite prepared to take the most drastic steps. Which, I think, might include murder."

There were audible gasps from some at mention of the word. And Daryl stepped closer to him peering deeply into his eyes, trying to find a definite clue as to why he said it.

"Now don't get excited," Gordon hastened to reassure them. "I may just be shooting in the dark. Or maybe I didn't like that egg who did the talking. But at any rate, I would advise the utmost precautions. These men are dangerous."

"That's fine!" Daryl exclaimed. "Just dandy. Now you tell them you think their lives are in danger, after you say we have no right here."

"Not so fast, my pretty. I didn't advocate desertion. I just said precautions must be taken. So we might as well go into that.

"Jepson. Is the beach the only means of getting to the lodge?"

"Nope. There's an old logging road what comes in around the side and circles off to the old Gates' place, that they c'n use. Course it's in the open, too, like the beach. An' back of the main lodge the tree line starts a hundred feet or so, back. Ain't much to worry about there."

"How far from the beach is this logging road?" Gordon asked. "You see, if we're going to post guard, we'll want to get all roads covered."

Jepson arose and walked slowly to one of the windows. He motioned for Gordon to come over.

"See. There it is," he said, pointing to a wide path coming from the forest behind the lodge. "If they try to cut-cross from it, they'd have to crawl on their bellies through the brush for about a good fifty yards. An' there is where it runs side by side with the beach until it cuts back again."

Gordon was quick to see that this Ongren was at a disadvantage. If he intended using force, Jepson had control of all approaches. But another thought presented itself. Why use force? Why not simply call the mainland, have a Sheriff come over, and settle the thing in lawful fashion?

The same thought presented itself to Sam Winthrop. Although he felt about the same way Gordon did, there were other things.. Suddenly he smiled. Perhaps it was just as well...

"Y'know," Gordon said in a musing tone, "maybe Ongren hasn't got such an airtight claim. Maybe there was a clause of notification. For example, were you notified of a change of mortgagers?"

"Didn' know nothin' about anythin' till this same tough egg came over and told us what his boss wanted," Jepson said.

"Do you have a phone?" Gordon asked.

"Two of them, one public and one private," Jepson said. "Right this way."

He led the way to his office, which proved to be an ante-room off the main one. Jepson sat at the desk, lifted the phone from its cradle and waited for the buzzing sound to come to his ears. A startled look widened his eyes.

"Out of order," he said in a puzzled tone. "That's funny! I talked to Greenpoint yesterday."

"Let's try the public phone," Gor-

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don suggested.

The others guessed something was wrong by the way the two men came out of the office. Jeff, who knew every expression on his friend's face, had better than an idea. As Gordon passed him, Jeff whispered:

"Wires cut, huh?"

GORDON MERELY shook his head and continued in Jepson's wake. The other phone was in a booth. He fished a nickel from his trouser pocket and placed it in the slot. It came back almost immediately. He tried again with the same results.

"Dirty skunks must have cut the wires," Jepson said.

"But why?" Gordon wanted to know. "If they're so in the right, surely they wouldn't have to do that."

"Then maybe they're not in the right," Daryl said.

"Look, Jepson," Gordon turned to the resort owner. "How many more of you are there in this vicinity?"

"Three more," Jepson said. "There's the Gates, Hauber up near the point, and Jogensen a mile down the line."

"Different directions?" Gordon asked.

"Only Gates' place. The other two are due north."

"Would it take long for one of your boys to get to these two places and find out what's happened to them?" Gordon asked.

"Hour, maybe a bit more. Fred."

"Yes, sir," said the oldest, a thick-set, red-haired youth.

"Git along and see Jorgensen and Hauber, and find out if they been bothered like us..."

"And tell them to come here with you," Gordon suggested. A thought occured. "Oh, yes, Fred. Better have them test their phones. If they're in working condition, call the sheriff on the mainland. At any rate, have them bring their rifles."

"You bet!" Fred said excitedly.

"Well, might as well make ourselves comfortable till Fred comes back," Gordon suggested. "From what our friend said, I don't imagine they'll try anything until it gets dark. He *did* give a grace period."

Sam, who had been standing by one of the windows, called to the others:

"Say! Come over here."

He pointed to a flag pole not far from the beach.

"What's that for?" he asked.

"We put a red lantern up there when some of the men fish late. It gives them a landmark," Jepson explained.

"Couldn't it serve as a distress signal?" Sam asked.

"Sam!" the girl exclaimed and threw her arms around him. "What a marvelous idea!"

"Excellent!" Gordon said. "You have lanterns?"

"Let's go. They're in the machine room."

The machine room proved to be a small shed which housed a gas tank, fishing gear, oars, and various equipment for the boats. There were also several lanterns. It took a few minutes, and while the others watched in an odd anticipation, as though they were expecting something.

Nor did it take long to materialize. A tinkling sound rang out on the still air and the lantern was shattered to bits. Someone, with a high-powered rifle which had a silencer on it, was making sure that Jepson could not make contact with the outside world.

"Very interesting," Gordon said softly. "Very interesting."

"It'll take more than that to stop me," Jepson said ruefully, as he hauled the shattered lantern down.

"Better not stand around like this,"

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Winthrop said. "After all, we know they're not fooling, now."

"I don't think they'll do anything. That was just a warning. But at least we know where we stand and where they stand," Gordon said. "I don't like it."

Jepson was examining the lantern. He called the others around and pointed to two holes though the metal from which the glass had been shot.

"See!" he pointed to a small hole. "That's where the lead hit first. Then it came out the bottom, but from this direction. The hole on the bottom is larger. More ragged than the one on top. Just proves that the shell came from some place above."

"Which means...?" Winthrop asked

"That they got some guy planted in some tree. Could be a mile away, though I don't think so. Okay. Let's get back in."

SAM AND Jeff were playing a game on the slot machine. Jepson had fixed it so they didn't have to feed it quarters. Daryl and Mrs. Jepson had disappeared in the kitchen. Jepson's son had taken the dog and had gone for a walk along the beach. Jepson and Gordon were seated on the sofa, in close conversation.

Jepson was saying:

"...Funny thing. First I heard about this Ongren guy, he comes along one day couple weeks back and sets down on the porch. I had a couple people out for the northern pike run, and I was sittin' around waitin' for the boat to come in.

"He sits and starts askin' questions. Big handsome guy, he was. Best lookin' feller I'd ever seed. Wants to know all about the island. I guess I talk all he wants to hear. Thanks me, and goes away. Next thing I know he sends that feller you saw, and I has to get off.'"

"But why," Gordon asked, more to himself than to the man sitting beside him, "were the lines cut?"

Jepson shrugged his spare shoulders.

"By the way," Gordon said. "Fred's been gone a long time. You said it shouldn't take more than an hour. Seems like a couple have gone by."

Jepson sighed deeply. "I know it. I been wonderin' too."

"Jepson!" Gordon said. "I've been thinking the situation over. You have a boat. I think you'd better take your wife and son over to Greenpoint. I don't like what's going on. You'd be safer there. And be in a position where you could get the sher...."

There wasn't any warning. The door opened suddenly and the same three who had been there earlier in the day, stalked in. And with them came another three. This time they were armed. The staring, empty mouths of the rifles covered everyone in the group.

"All right. Line up. And please do not be fool enough to attempt to go for your firearms," their leader said.

"What's the idea?" Gordon demanded.

"Just do what you're told," the other said. "Follow me."

There was a slight bend in the beach and out of sight from the house a small cruiser had been anchored. They were led to the cruiser, made to go on board, and while three of the men watched over them, the others busied themselves in getting off.

Gordon noticed that they hugged the beach, as the boat sped on.

The trip took an hour. Gordon sat so that he was close to Jepson. He was quick to note that Jepson's eyes went wide as he saw to where they were headed.

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"Something wrong?" he whispered.

"By golly!" Jepson exclaimed. "I know where we're headin' for. The old Darwell place."

"Is that bad or good?" Gordon asked.

"So that's where this Ongren's holed out," Jepson said aloud. But he was talking more to himself than to Gordon. "He sure picked a fine place. No wonder no one thought to nosey round. Always was strange men walking around up there."

Mystery on mystery, Gordon thought. Now this Darwell angle. Just what was going on. He'd never imagined a rustic holiday would turn into this.

Quite suddenly the boat's stern nosed into a narrow inlet which was almost hidden by overhanging brush, and shot into a shallow basin. Gordon grunted in surprise. There was a long wharf at which a half dozen more cruisers of the same type they were on, were tied to. Beyond the wharf and half in the water was a wide boat house, painted in camouflage colors. And beyond the boat house, up at the top of a steep slope, yet hidden from prying eyes, was an immense house.

"The Darwell place," Jepson explained.

THEIR ARRIVAL was the signal for a sudden activity from the boathouse. Figures could be seen running down the length of the wharf toward the oncoming boat. And those on board became even more watchful. The boat slid along the wharf with the faintest scraping sound.

"Out. One at a time," the leader of those in the boat, said.

The ones waiting were armed also. The prisoners were surrounded, and before there was even a thought of fight, the menacing guns were motioning them to march down the length of the still sunlit wooden planking.

Gordon and the others thought their goal was the boat house. But it was evident they were going to be taken directly to Ongren. For they continued past the bulk of the low house set on top of the hill. At certain intervals, guards emerged from recesses in the rock of the hill, and challenged the party. Beyond the few words which were exchanged, and always in a tongue foreign to the prisoners, there was nothing said.

But what they didn't see from the bottom of the hill was a secondary house, a sort of apron to the first, and set about twenty feet in advance of the other. This was to be their goal.

They were not to enter, however, without another search. Daryl's face went scarlet, as the hands of the guards went roughly over her. And yet there was something impersonal in their touch. What was more, she saw in their eyes, felt in their breathing that she was as a...she didn't quite know how to describe it...the only word which seemed to fit was, animal. But a foreign animal.

At last they were satisfied there were no hidden weapons.

"One at a time," the leader said. "You," he pointed to Gordon, "first."

Gordon didn't know quite what to expect. Certainly, he didn't expect what he found; two gentlemen seated at a table, who from their appearance seemed as far removed from those who had brought them, as the moon from the earth.

"Welcome," said one. He smiled as he said it and Gordon noticed the handsome teeth. He saw also that the face was one Hollywood could have claimed for its own.

He turned his glance to the other.

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"Horog! Doctor Horog!"

"Why Doctor Gordon!" Horog was as astounded as the other.

"You two know each other?" Ongren asked.

"But of course," Horog said. "This is Gordon, the famous biochemist. The man who almost resigned because the commission would not accept me. My friend, Gordon."

Horog rose, crossed around the wide table and embraced Gordon to his embarrassment.

"Very touching," Ongren said. "But first, I think we ought to know how it was Doctor Gordon was at the Jepsons?"

And that brought a flush of anger to Gordon's face.

"Which reminds me!" he said in a low voice. "So you're Ongren! I've been wanting to meet you."

"You have? Good! We are met. And what is it you want?"

"That's my question. What the hell do *you* want?" Gordon asked.

"I think Jagar gave you the answer," Ongren said.

"Only in part. Certainly you could have been more reasonable in your demands."

"I was," Ongren said with a visible effort at maintaining an equanamity that wasn't his by nature, "The Jepsons received notice. And enough time. I need their place and when they refused to leave, I had to do the only thing possible, under the circumstances. Now we are all here. In an hour or so, I will have a boat ready for them and for another family, the Haubers, to take you all to the mainland."

GORDON HAD to admit the fairness of Ongren's position. It was more than obvious that the man was doing his best to be impartial.

"Have Jepson come in," Gordon suggested. "I think he needs straightening out."

Ongren nodded his head in the direction of the guard. The man stepped out, and in a few seconds returned, with Jepson on his heels.

"Where's my boy, Fred?" Jepson demanded.

The question took them by surprise. A mottled flush settled on Ongren's features. He didn't like this man's manner.

"How should I know?" he asked sharply. "Am I nursemaid to your children?"

"No. But I saw Jem Hauber and he said Fred never got to his place."

Ongren's eyes narrowed perceptibly. This man had sent his son to the fat fool, Hauber. But he had never arrived. Jagar's patrols might have intercepted the boy....

"Call Jagar to me," he said to the guard at the door.

"Mighty?" Jagar said.

This oaf said he sent his son to the fat one's. Did any of your men see him?" Ongren asked.

"Aye. They saw him. He was stealing through the forest. A lower guard called to him to halt. Instead, he aimed a fire stick at the man and threw flame and heat from it. Of course the lower guard followed my instructions. The boy is no more."

Ongren turned to Jepson and gave him a level glance. It was impossible to say what went on behind those strange amber-colored eyes. Nor was there even the smallest quiver of face muscle, as Ongren gave Jepson the news of his son's death.

Jepson seemed stunned. He staggered slightly, but when Gordon stepped forward to lend a hand, Jepson shrugged the other off.

"Dead?" he asked tonelessly.

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"How....?"

Ongren told him.

Jepson looked blankly at the man seated behind the desk. He seemed to be at a loss. He turned his head toward Gordon, who bit his lip, started to say something, and realizing there wasn't anything one could say, only patted Jepson's shoulder.

And suddenly, with a quickness which couldn't be denied, Jepson leaped the width of the desk, and fastened his fingers on Ongren's throat.

Jepson screamed. "You killed my boy! I'll kill you!"

It seemed impossible that any man could move in such a position. Yet Ongren rose slowly and backed away from the desk dragging Jepson with him. He made no effort to tear the fingers away. Slowly he moved back. And Gordon, too horrified to move, watched in amazement. Something was horribly wrong. Jepson's fingers were clamped with a grip of death, sunk deep in the flesh. Yet the other neither changed color, nor breathing.

He merely backed away until he was clear of the desk, then still backing away, walked backward until he came to the guard. Jepson was breathing heavily. His feet were dragging in the carpet. And a terrible grin of anticipation was on his thin lips. Insofar as Jepson was concerned, Ongren was a dead man.

Gordon saw the guard's intention too late. He leaped forward, only to find the pudgy body of Horog in his way. And before he could get around the other, it happened.

ONGREN HAD dragged Jepson around so that his back was to the guard. Then the guard drew a knife from a hidden sheath, and plunged it to the hilt in Jepson's back. But though Jepson died instantly, the fingers did not release their grip. Ongren's eyes met those of the guard. Not a word was uttered yet the guard acted as though he had received a command. He reached up and pulled the fingers loose.

Jepson fell flat on his face, a spreading pool of blood under the still body.

"Don't! Don't!" Horog's voice was giving an urgent message to Gordon's numbed brain. "Don't interfere!"

Somehow the words penetrated into his subsconcious. Gordon fell back and shook himself free of Horog's restraining fingers. He burned a look of utter hatred into the face of the man coming back to them. But if Ongren saw it, he gave no sign of it. The handsome face was as placid as ever, and as pale.

An odd question came to Gordon's mind; Why wasn't either the neck or face swollen? Then Ongren spoke and the answer to the unspoken question no longer made any difference to Gordon.

"I had intended other things," Ongren said, and his voice held a ring of steel. "But now I must act differently. He intended murder. You saw what happened. *He touched me with sacrilegious fingers!* No one can ever do that to me!

"He paid the penalty."

Gordon burst out. "You killed his boy! You gave the order! He was justified in his attack. You murdered him! Mister! I don't know who you are, but for those acts you'll pay. The full penalty. And as for you, Horog, I'd advise you to get away from here."

"Which advice I can't give to either you or your friends," Ongren said

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coolly. "You'll have to stay, willingly or otherwise. I can no longer send you to safety. . . ."

"And what?" Gordon asked with icy reserve, "do you propose doing with us?"

"Well," Ongren said blandly. "You're a scientist. So Horog says, and a famous one, to boot. I have work for you which is in your line. The others will also be put to use, in whatever capacity they are capable of performing."

"In a pig's hams!" Gordon said. "If you get what I mean?"

"Evidently you haven't understood. Has he, Doctor?"

But Horog seemed bewildered by the succession of events. Jepson's death had shaken him visibly. The slow dawn of a recognized horror peeled the sanity from his eyes. Something which had bothered him before became plain to him.

"I think you'd better do as he says," Horog said.

"And what I say still goes. Let him make me," Gordon said.

"Very well," Ongren was matter-of-fact. "Call the guards."

Gordon acted without hesitation and without warning. One instant he was facing Ongren, the next he was leaping toward the guard. The guard had turned, after Ongren gave him his instructions, and started for the door. Gordon met him half way. Instinct made the guard turn toward the man coming to him. One hand went down toward the knife in its leather sheath. But the hand never made it. From five feet off, Gordon went into a headlong dive which swept the guard from his feet. The man's head hit the floor with a thud. And the hand fell away from the knife hilt.

AS THE guard's hand slapped to the floor uselessly, Gordon's fist closed on it, and bent it back. There was the sound of snapping bone. Nor did Gordon stop there. In another lithe move, he brought the same hand up to the knife and pulled it from the sheath. He started to get to his knees, the knife's cold steel gleaming in the light, and a hand which was like a lump of concrete slapped him alongside the jaw. A million stars exploded in his brain, yet he did not lose consciousness. He shook his head, got his leg under him and heaved erect, just as the guard hit him again.

The blow took him high on the chest. But it literally knocked him spinning. And this time the guard came in, high and with arms spread, as though he only wanted to get Gordon in his embrace. He almost did. But just as the arms enfolded its victim, Gordon struck. And this time time there was something besides flesh and blood at the end of the arm. There was eight inches of gleaming steel which was stained a bloody crimson, at the end of that arm. And all eight inches disappeared into the belly of the guard. The blow stopped the guard cold. It should have killed him. At least Gordon thought so. For he stepped back, waiting for the man to fall.

Instead, the man came plunging in again. And this time he succeeded in getting his arms around Gordon. But not before Gordon saw that there was a tear in the man's odd uniform. Nothing else. The arms went around him and they were like steel bands. Gordon exerted all his strength,

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pushed back from the other, clasped his fingers together, and with a superhuman effort threw his clasped arms up until they were over the other's head. Then Gordon brought his hands down with terrific force.

They struck a hammer-blow on the bridge of the nose, collapsing it.

And the man staggered back, his hands up to his face, and his mouth opened, making inhuman sounds of pain and fright. He staggered backward, still screaming, while Gordon watched. Then the guard turned and ran to the wall and began to beat his head against the wooden wall until he fell to the floor.

Gordon looked at the man, too stunned to move. It was Horog who walked over and examined him.

"Why.. He's dead!" Horog said in amazement. "But how? Wh-at happened?"

"I don't know," Gordon gasped. "I just hit him. Hey! Where's Ongren?"

Ongren hadn't disappeared in thin air. He had waited his chance and while the fight raged, he had stepped out and called Jagar and given him instructions. So that even while the two who were left in the room, turned to each other in perplexity, the door opened, and Jagar, at the head of a squad of men appeared; what was more, they were armed with rifles.

But Ongren wasn't with them.

"Come along," Jagar commanded.

There was no question of fight this time, Gordon knew. Not if he wanted to live. And he did for more than one reason. He stepped forward and the guards made a circle around him. Then, with the precision of well-trained soldiers, they marched from the room. Horog's face tightened in sudden determination. He had made his mind up to something.

GORDON WAS marched by Jagar to the compound behind the huge house which was Ongren's headquarters. The others were already behind the wire enclosure. And Gordon soon saw there were more than just the ones he knew. There were some twenty people there. Jagar shoved him roughly past the gate, and the steel trap closed behind Gordon with a clang of doom.

The girl, Jeff, Sam, and Jepson's son were standing in a group by themselves. Jepson's wife had found friends and was with them. The four barely waited till the gate closed on Gordon before surrounding him and started to bombard him with questions. But Gordon had ears only for the boy's question.

He put his arm around Jepson's son and said:

"Sorry, son. But, well. I guess there isn't any way I can tell you what happened..."

There was no need to say more. The youngster's eyes filled with tears. He turned his head for a second, then turned to face Gordon again.

"Please," he said. "don't tell maw. She'll take it pretty hard. An' what about Fred?"

Godon shook his head.

The boy turned away and walked to his mother.

"What happened?" Jeff asked.

Gordon told them without mincing words.

"But what's it all about?" Winthrop asked.

"I don't know yet," Gordon said. "But I can say that, unless I'm crazy, well, maybe I am for saying it; but I don't think these people are human."

They looked at him as though they

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thought he was crazy.

"In the first place," Gordon explained, "I broke the guard's arm. Yet he used it as though there was nothing wrong with it. Then I stabbed him. Mind you, eight inches of steel in his abdomen. All it did was wipe off the blood Jepson had shed, from its surface. But the guard didn't bleed. Yet when I hit him the last blow, I killed him.

"Another thing. Jepson was strangling this Ongren. When Jepson's hands were taken from Ongren's throat, there wasn't a mark, or swelling to show. I don't know what to think."

"Y'know, Gordy," Jeff said. "These guys look like humans because they got faces. But if you ask me, they're like dead men."

Gordon looked at Jeff as though he thought the other was mad. Yet Jeff had said the very things Gordon was thinking. The dead can't bleed... He shook his head as though to clear it of brain-fog. He was thinking like a fool. Dead men! There was a more sane explanation than that. If he could only get hold of Horog?

"By the way," he said, switching to another topic, "who are those people?"

Daryl answered:

"Seems like Ongren rounded up all the residents of the island who didn't follow his instructions. I don't know their names, but there are five families here."

"Do any of them know more than we do about what's going on?" Gordon asked.

They looked blankly at him.

"H'm. Well, might as well ask," Gordon said.

The Haubers, father and son, knew why. They had been in the wire enclosure for three days.

"Yep. I know," Hauber said. "This feller, Jagar, told us. He stayed over to my place for a while. Seems as how he likes to fish. They don't have no fish where they come from...."

"How do you mean?"

Hauber shrugged his disbelief of what Jagar said.

"Crazy coot, this Jagar. Says as how they come from some place way off in space, or somethin' like that. Anyhow, this Ongren feller's their chief or king or whatever he's called.

"They been on this planet a couple months. Time don't mean nothin' to them..."

THIS WAS incredible, Gordon thought, even as Hauber went on. Beings from another planet. What sort of gaff were they giving Hauber?

"...There ain't none where they come from," Hauber continued. "Course I don't believe it. Some kind of trick they're playing..."

"They killed Jepson while I watched," Gordon said. "And Jagar said they killed Jepson's son, Fred."

"Near as I can figure out," Hauber's son said, "they're farmers. Least, that's what it looks like with that acre and a half patch they're cultivatin' back in the woods beyond the house."

"Farmers?" Gordon said. "That doesn't sound right."

"May not *sound* right, but that's what they're doin'," Hauber's son insisted.

"Has Ongren talked to any of you?" Gordon asked.

"Yep. To me," Hauber said.

Gordon wished Ongren had talked to Hauber's son. The father wasn't

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as loquacious. It was like pulling teeth, getting words from him.

"What did he say?"

"Said we ain't got no choice no more. Gonna work for him, we are. Work good, pay good. That's all."

"Don't be foolish," Gordon grunted sourly. "That man's a killer. A cold-blooded rattler-of-a-killer. He doesn't have to pay anything. I'd just like to know what's behind all this, that's all."

And up on the hill, in the grey-stone house, Ongren was pacing back and forth in the book-lined library, while a worried and fearful Horog watched him.

"I didn't want to use force," Ongren said savagely. "It's easier to get things in almost any other way. But now they forced my hand. Oh, don't worry, scientist. Nothing can harm us. We are beyond and above that. There's the matter of patrolling the island, though. We have some twenty-odd people here, who, no doubt, have friends on the mainland. These people will begin to wonder. And because of this stupid Jepson and his idiot boy, I can't release the others.

"We'll just have to get things done faster, that's all. Have you arrived at a conclusion?"

"Yes," Horog said. "But I'd very much like to have Gordon confirm it."

"That meddler! He's trouble. And what's worse, he's a fighter. I don't like him."

"I'm sure he returns the compliment," Horog said sourly. "The point is, he's one of the world's greatest biochemists. In this case, a neccesary ingredient to the stew you're cooking."

"Horog," Ongren stopped his animal-like pacing in front of the other. "Just what have you guessed?"

"Enough to make me afraid of you," Horog answered frankly. "I love life," he went on. "I certainly don't want to die. And think you have it in mind to kill me. But you won't until I can conclude the experiment. So a bargain, Ongren..."

"Go on."

"My life—and I'll get Gordon to work with me."

"How?"

"You promise that no harm will come to the others."

Ongren laughed, but the sound only sent a chill down Horog's spine. There was no gaiety in that laugh. A nameless horror had given birth to that cackle of mirth.

"How quaint. A promise. Very well, scientist. Go to him."

GORDON SLAPPED a fist into a palm. Horog was right. The stocky, nearsighted scientist rubbed moist palms together, and looked at the lean man. Gordon turned away and looked out into the night. But there was no answer in the stars or clouds, and even the moon had a blank face. Gordon knew he had been put on a spot. The safety of all those people lay in his hands. He couldn't let them down, though he knew Ongren was little to be trusted.

He turned back to Horog.

"Tell me, Horog," he said. "What sort of work are you doing here?"

A something that was like exultation, yet which held a little of panic was in Horog's voice:

"The most terrific thing man ever dreamed of," he said. "I'm not sure, though I think the Russians were once on the track. At any rate, they didn't make the grade.

"Ongren and his men, or whatever

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you want to call them, are from another planet. Some sort of place he calls, Clasma. I'm not an astronomer, so I can't give its location. But it's beyond our universe..."

"Then how did he get here?" Gordon broke in.

Horog shrugged his shoulders.

"He never said, yet I don't doubt him. It's a very strange planet, with some of the features of Mars. For it has little of vegetation or water on its surface. Its cities and people have a life beneath the surface. How he found out about the atom bomb, I don't know. Maybe they have some sort of viewing mechanisms which are beyond our understanding? But he claims he saw it, the beginning and the result.

"Now it seems that their scientists have never been able to split the atom. So they watched and tried to figure out what was going on. They couldn't. But they did know that in our experiments, was the solution for their problem. The problem of maintaining life. That's why Ongren is here. He is their king; it was his duty to come."

"And you believe this—this fairy tale?" Gordon asked.

"Wait," Horog warned. 'You've seen, experienced some of the strange things about them.

"Let me tell you of something which occured a few nights ago. Ongren broke an ash tray. A sliver of glass was imbedded in his thumb. He pulled it free, and the glass was as clear as crystal. There was no blood. Remember the guard? You plunged the knife to the hilt into his belly. Yet he did not bleed. Why?"

"That's what I want you to tell me," Gordon said.

"Wait," Horog said. "There's more. The man you killed. I examined him afterward. There wasn't a mark on his body. It confirmed something I'd seen earlier. I had made it a point to watch that thumb of Ongren's. There wasn't a mark to show where the glass had gone in."

Horog put his hands out, palms up, as though in mute begging of an explanation.

But Gordon didn't have an answer. If there was an answer, it would have to wait. Right now, he wanted to find out more about this plant business, more about what the atom had to do with their being here.

"Let's get back to the atom," Gordon said.

"Very well. Ongren was present when the first bomb was exploded..."

"What do you mean, present?"

"I don't know," Horog said, irritably. "That's what he said. Probably in the space ship he came on. He flew through the cloud and caught some of the atomic particles thrown off, and placed them in a container of plants. Those plants grew in a manner which was unlike that of Clasma. But it wasn't enough. He had to have a certain soil. And that soil can be found only on this island."

"You've seen it, I mean these plants?"

"I have seen them, and so will you."

There was nothing more to think about. Already, Gordon's scientific curiosity was stirred. Plant life which could only grow in the dust of an atomic explosion...

"Very well, Horog," Gordon said. "Tell your friend I accept."

CHAPTER IV

Little Man Plants

FOUR MEN with Jagar, all armed with rifles were waiting for Gor-

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don the next morning. Gordon and the others had slept in the small house, the night before. An armed group of guards patrolled the area all of the night.

Horog and Ongren were waiting for Gordon. They were having breakfast.

"Might as well eat," Ongren suggested.

Gordon took his place silently and ate of the food. He had to admit Ongren had an excellent chef. The two men were silent, each lost in his own thoughts. Gordon watched them surreptitiously, but could only hazard guesses as to what was in their minds.

Ongren rose as Gordon finished the last of his coffee.

"Might as well get started," he said. "Come along."

And Gordon was quick to note that Jagar and his men walked behind him. Ongren wasn't taking any chances.

"First," Ongren said, "I'll show you our *plantation.*"

Gordon's mouth popped open at the sight of it. It was, as Hauber's son had said, about an acre in area. Neat, orderly rows of green plants. Then Gordon looked closer and a thrill of horror raced through him.

He knew now what Horog meant when he said, "plants, like men." About ten inches high, the plants had a trunk which was slender and smooth, from the upper part of which a pair of limbs grew. Another pair of limbs grew from the lower part of the trunk so that it looked as though the trunk had separated into two, both of which were rooted into the ground. The trunk did not extend much higher than the uppermost limbs, and came to a rounded protuberance, which greatly resembled a head.

"Take a close look," Ongren said.

Gordon bent closer and drew back in sudden alarm. They, these *monstrous things were men.* That was a head, and there were fingers attached to the limbs which were like arms. But that made them arms. For as Gordon bent closer, the tiny hand-like branches moved toward him.

The air grew stifling, close, as though he were in a room from which all the life-giving air had been drawn.

"Wonderful, aren't they?" Ongren asked. "And they'll grow only on this little patch of ground. In all the universe there is no other ground fertile enough for them. It is as though some visitor from outer space, from the great galaxy which spawned my home, was thrown by a cataclysmic force, to land on this tiny square of earth. Wonderful!"

Gordon shook off the pall of fear, and the trained observer came forth. He noticed things other than the plants, now. For example, there were troughs filled with a blackish substance, from out of which tubes were sunk into the ground. There was a trough for each of the plants. Literally, there were thousands of troughs. An oddly bitter odor seeped from the troughs near at hand.

He saw something else, also. The plants had been laid so that there was a good two feet of space between them.

"But there's more to be seen, Gordon," Horog said. "I'll show you."

GORDON followed Ongren and Horog down a path which led between a stand of trees. The path wound in and out among the tall pines. It ended suddenly in a breath-taking sight. A huge sphere, made of some sort of metal that was either aluminum or chrome steel, stood in the center of cleared ground, yet so

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close to the forest, the trees formed a roof over the rounded top.

"Our laboratory," Horog said. "The alchemist's secret workshop. Wait till you see what I have in there. Remember Nicolai Vlokov's formula which somehow never worked out?"

"Of course," Gordon said. "Hell! I labored on that theory for ten months, and finally gave up."

"Well, he was on the right trail. He just didn't have the tools to work with."

"Tools? What kind of tools?"

"The cyclotron."

"You mean you've got a cyclotron to work with?" Gordon asked in amazement.

"And more. But come in and see."

Not even Los Alamos had more to work with, Gordon saw. There was everything he needed. And some things strange to him. Horog explained them:

"I was faced with a problem that was more unusual than any I'd ever met with. Ongren wanted me to grow human beings from plant life...."

"Not quite," Ongren interrupted. "Only plants imbued with human qualities, and possessing human traits."

"Which makes them human," Gordon said.

"No. They have no soul."

"Bosh," Gordon said. "*Soul!* What sort of child's talk is that?"

"Nevertheless, they have no soul. But they do have some things which are better for my purpose. For example, they have the power to reproduce...."

"You talk as if you didn't have," Gordon said.

"I have," Ongren said. "But my men haven't. That's the whole scheme of things. We must have a something which can reproduce itself, yet not be a human being. Our planet cannot sustain human life...."

"What about yourself?" Gordon asked.

"I, and others like me, are the end product of our environment. We can live in our cities. But others cannot. I know. I have tried to make them." He shook his head in negation.

"Now let me get this straight," Gordon asked in exasperation. "You mean all men...."

"Right! Children can be born of woman, but who is there to instill the seed? There are only five of us on all Clasma who have the power of reproduction."

"So what good are these things?" Gordon said, pointing to the plants.

He did a double-take. There were a couple of plants in a large container near where they were standing talking. And it had seemed to him that the plants had turned their faces in his direction when he mentioned the word, "things."

"They will have their place. And a very important place that will be. They will be the drones. They will labor for me. And I will be the most powerful man in all Clasma. For with them, I will be able to wage war and not worry about losses."

"I think this guy's nuts," Gordon said in an aside to Horog.

"I think not. At least in the way you mean it," Horog said aloud. "But let's get back to now. The cyclotron is used in the first step. Then...."

Good God! Gordon throught. Here's the most stupendous discovery of modern times. Even greater than the splitting of the atom. For Horog had found a way to reproduce life in something other than a human being. Truly, Horog didn't need Gordon. It was the other way around. Then

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why....?

"Well, gentlemen," Ongren said, "I must get back to my work. See you at lunch."

"BUT HOROG," Gordon said after Ongren left. "How the hell could you let yourself in for this?"

"It was hard to refuse a hundred thousand dollars. Besides, Ongren promised me the thrill of something new, the chance to become the most famous biochemist in all the world. Remember, Gordon, I was refused that chance at Los Alamos."

"Yes, I know," Gordon said.

"Then you can understand a little of how I felt. Worse, I was practically labeled, 'traitor.' Of course, I realized once he got me here, Ongren wasn't going to let me go."

"Say! Just what *does* he want?" Gordon asked.

Horog hesitated before answering:

"I'm not sure. He says he wants to rule the place he came from. But now that he's here, maybe there's a change of plan. Y'know, we have only his word that he *is* from another planet. *I* haven't seen any space ship. And I'm sure he didn't *walk*."

"I don't trust that guy. Not as far as I can throw the Empire State Building," Gordon said.

"Neither do I. But we're not in any position to do anything about it right now. Perhaps later..."

"Okay, Horog," Gordon said. "Might as well get to work. I'd like to see what's being done here."

Gordon was at the far end of the laboratory when the woman screamed. He didn't hear it. But he happened to have his glance turned toward Horog, near the door, and he saw the other start, and stop what he was doing. Something in the man's pose made Gordon come toward him at a run.

"What's wrong?" Gordon asked.

And the woman's second scream was answer enough.

They both leaped for the door, but Gordon made it first. He leaped through, and what he saw gave wings to his feet. There was a cluster of people, men, women, and the guards of Ongren, all in a tight group. Suddenly he saw one of the guards stagger back, and saw Jeff Conners rushing him.

By the time he got there, the melee was general.

The men were swinging with their fists at the guards, who were retaliating with the butts of their rifles. He saw one man go down and as he lay on the ground, the guard crushed the man's skull with one blow of the rifle butt.

But Gordon was interested only in Daryl's safety.

What he didn't see was Ongren coming from the opposite direction. The big, handsome man was running with terrific speed. It was as if he knew the guards would kill them all unless he could stop them. As it was, two of the men were killed before he arrived.

In the meantime, Gordon had reached Daryl's side and had dragged her away from the scene to where most of the women were huddled, their arms around the children.

"The murderers!" Daryl said shudderingly. "That's what they are!"

"What happened?" Gordon asked.

SHE LOOKED away from the fighting men, and turned a terror-stricken glance at him.

"It happened to me," she said. "It was one of those horrible plants. It reached up with one of its branches and touched my leg. It was like a

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moist hand, a baby hand, carressing me. It was frightening."

"You mean it actually reached up and touched you of its own will?"

"I don't know. The guards had given us instructions what to do; some of us had to carry a solution to those pans; others had to keep the ground clear of weeds; and the children had to pull the weeds over to one side and burn them. I was one of those who was supposed to keep the ground clear of weeds. That's when it happened. I had reached down to pull up a weed and felt the touch. It frightened me so, I screamed.

"One of the guards came running over and asked what had happened. I said I wouldn't come close to those things if my life depended on it. He slapped me. One of the men saw it and told the guard off. In return the guard struck him. Then Jeff, who had come over to see what the excitement was all about, hit the guard..."

"And that's when I came in. But I guess the excitement is over. At least they've calmed down. Now stay here, Daryl, and I'll take a look-see about this."

Ongren had just finished haranguing the guards as Gordon walked up. Jagar gave them orders and they scattered to their former posts again. But the men still stood in a close group, tight-lipped and sullen, ready for another fight. The two who had been killed lay where they had fallen.

"Better tell these men to mind their tempers," Ongren said. "My guards don't need much to set them off."

"If I ever hear or see one of your men strike another woman like Miss Winthrop was struck," Gordon said easily, "I'll not only take the guy apart who did the hitting, but I'll also do my level best to beat your brains out!"

"My men had instructions to stop instantly, anyone who touched, in any manner, one of those plants. The woman was no different than a man to him."

"Then explain the difference! Jeff!"

"Yeah, doc?"

"You heard what I told this jerk? I'll make it plain to him. If they ever pull another stunt like that, have the men pull every every one of these plants out by the roots."

"And if they do," Ongren said. "There won't be a single one alive, man, woman or child, who will leave the island."

Gordon bit his lip. Ongren had him. Already four had died. He felt responsible for the rest. Ongren would do just as he said. Somehow, they had to escape, or get help. Gordon's face was a thunder-cloud of anger, as he turned to Horog, who was standing silently by.

"Horog! So help me..."

"Easy, Gordon," Horog said. "What's happened is regrettable. Now they know what not to do. Let it stand that way."

THE NEXT two weeks were the hardest Gordon had ever known. Yet in one way, they were the most wonderful. He worked on a schedule with Horog, a regular eight-hour day. It wasn't the kind of lab work he'd known before. This was brain-wearing stuff, and he hadn't the organization behind him as he had had before. It was Horog and he alone. But after the day's work was done, he saw Daryl. The hours he spent with her made up for the bitterness of the others.

Though the other women were farm and outdoor people, the kind who hadn't known the soft city ways, it was something to see the way they acknowledged her leadership. There

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were seven other women and eight children, the oldest twelve, and the youngest, five. Daryl saw to it that the children never lacked for play facilities. Nor was their education neglected. She organized a kind of primitive school, and taught functional studies. For neither she nor any of the other women knew how long their servitude would last.

But after the day's work was done and she had spent her time with the children, then Gordon would come early in the evening and they would stroll within the confines of their outdoor prison, talking or as was sometimes their wont, merely walking, hand clasping hand, in perfect companionship.

And all the time, the plants grew in size.

One day, Horog and Gordon made one of their inspections of the plants. It was that day that Horog came to the conclusion that it was time for the transplanting. It was a moment of great decision. It was the moment their experiment would be either proved or a failure.

Horog detailed some of the men to dig several of the monstrosities up, making sure there was enough dirt to hold it. These were brought to the laboratory and placed in vats which had already been prepared for their burden with the chemical solution Horog and Gordon had worked out.

The two scientists waited until the men left. They looked at each other, fear and wonder in their eyes. In a sense they felt God-like. For if their calculations were successful they would be like a God.

"Well, Gordon," Horog said. "Might as well begin. You take A-tank, I'll take B and so forth until we've bathed them all. Then..."

Gordon knew what he meant. Then, in an hour or so, at the outside, the solution would begin to work, and they would know.

By the time they got through bathing the last of the plants, the first was ready for the drying process. This was a huge section at one end of the building which could take almost a thousand of the human-like plants. One by one, the stiffened grotesqueries were stood up, a foot of space between them, until there were ten of them, the sample amount they'd determined to use, ready.

A special built blower sent currents of hot air at them. It would be a matter of another hour or so before they would be ready for the final test. It was time to call Ongren.

Ongren came in, rubbing his palms in anticipation. It was not only a great moment for the scientists, but also the culmination of the dream he had. He looked at the stiffened plants, smiled, and said:

"So it is here. How long before you'll know?"

"Hour. Perhaps two," Horog said.

"That long? What do you think, Gordon?"

"I think I'm a damn fool," Gordon said.

"What do you mean?"

"The realization of what I'm possibly doing has just come to me."

"Too late, my friend," Ongren said. "Jagar!"

THE EVER-READY Jagar, and his squad of men, had been waiting behind the partly-opened door. Ongren had made sure of their presence. He had a pretty good idea that Gordon, seeing his handiwork, would try to back out. Or worse, attempt something drastic. There was a great deal about their work which Ongren did not understand. And he wasn't going to take a chance of a last second sabotage job.

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"But Ongren," Horog protested. "We still must have Doctor Gordon."

"Shut up," Ongren said quietly. "*I* don't need anyone. Not even you. Put a guard over these two. Twenty-four hour duty. They get time off only for food and exercise. Otherwise, they spend their time in here. I don't want them dead, yet, Jagar. But rough them up every time they start stalling. Now let's look at my little plant men."

He walked closer to the human-looking plants while Jagar and his men surrounded Gordon and Horog. The guards held their guns at the ready, not taking any chances on any sudden breaks from the two men. But Horog and Gordon had eyes only for Ongren.

Ongren stabbed with a stiffened finger at several of the seemingly petrified plants. He shook his head several times in amazement at the very human feel of their textured skin.

"They look like caricatures of us," he said aloud. "But no matter what they look like, they are going to suit my purpose. Think of it. Millions of these beings, all subject to me, because they haven't a brain, and I will do their thinking for them, running around this world."

"So it is this world," Horog said bitterly. "I have been a traitor, a worse one than the kind they accused me of being."

"Take it easy, man," it was Gordon's turn to console the other. "You couldn't possibly have backed out of it. He would have had you killed. And found another to boot. We're not licked yet."

Ongren had the hearing of a cat. He turned swiftly and smiled at them. It was the same kind of curling-lipped grin some cats have.

"But you are, you know," he said. "There are ways of making you do the things I want. For example, Doctor Gordon. I like your friend, Miss Winthrop. Remember what I said about me having reproductive powers?"

Gordon paled. This beast wouldn't dare.

"And I will," Ongren said, as though he had read the other's mind. "Not that I give a hang for your Earth women. Clasma's have greater beauty. But I won't let a small detail like that stop me. I think we understand each other, Gordon?"

"You win," Gordon said. "Hands down."

"Good. Now what's the next step?" Ongren asked.

"The injection of our formula. It will give them the powers of locomotion. Otherwise, they are as human as we. Perhaps more. I don't know," Horog said.

Ongren nodded his head. Fine! There were a couple of thousand of these things. The ground could produce as many as they could plant. The whole thing was a matter of getting them into the warehouse.

"Jagar," he called to his head guard. "Detail one of your men to have the guards bring in the prisoners."

ONGREN WAITED until they had all assembled before he began speaking:

"All you men," he said, "over there," he pointed to where he wanted them. "Now you women and children, over there."

When they had arranged themselves the way he wanted, with a heavy guard over the men, he paraded before them, talking as he did so:

"The time has come for your final task. After that, freedom. You will all stay here for the next few days.

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I will have my men bring in bedding, and food will be given you as before. From now on until it is over, Doctors Horog and Gordon will give you your instructions. Follow them and all will be well. However, there is one thing I want kept in mind.

"Under no circumstances will I allow one of these plants to come to harm."

He waited for a few seconds while they digested what he said, then continued:

"I may have acted like a slave driver, but it was neccesary. I will be worse if necessary, also. Keep that in mind."

He laughed harshly, deep in his throat, favored them with a contemptuous look, and turned on his heel and left. With him the bulk of the guards left also, leaving only a small detail of men.

The instant Ongren was out of the door, they all crowded around Horog and Gordon, all trying to talk at once. Jeff had the loudest voice:

"Doc! What's going on? What the hell is this all about, anyway? I'm ready to take a chance and knock out of this place."

Gordon held up his hand for silence.

"Just a minute, folks," he said. "Let's not knock ourselves out. I'll talk to you later, Jeff. Now, Daryl, you've sort of set up a system. What's the usual procedure?"

"Well," she said, "first of all, Mrs. Harris gives the kids, the younger ones, that is, their lessons. The older ones get their exercises outdoors. The guards permit them a sort of freedom. They let them run around a lot. The men and women have their duties which Ongren detailed for them. That's about all, Homer."

Gordon knew what Daryl meant by lessons. It was oral, of course, nursery rhymes and singing, and a little arithmetic. It kept the youngsters busy. He motioned for one of the guards. The man came over and Gordon told him he was sending the older boys out for their exercises. The guard nodded that it was all right with him.

"All right, kids," Daryl said. "You can go out and play, now. But don't get lost. And don't forget to tell me what you've accomplished."

She smiled wistfully as they trooped through the door. But the smile was gone as she turned to Gordon again. Her eyes sent a message into his. He gave her a curt nod, as he gave orders for the men and women to get to work, digging up the balance of the plants and bringing them into the laboratory.

"I think Daryl has something up her sleeve," he whispered in an aside to Horog. "Make yourself busy; keep the guards' attention away from us."

"You don't have to," she said, laughingly. "They're stupid. We've found that out in the last two weeks. Stupid and cruel. But they won't bother us unless we try to break out, or don't follow instructions."

WHILE HOROG busied himself with injections, Gordon took the girl to one side and listened while he prepared the injections for Horog.

"Y'know," she began, "kids are a little like animals. They're curious, get their little noses into everything. The guards permitted them a great deal of freedom, and the kids took advantage of it. For instance, they had the run not only of the camp, but of the forest around here. And they found something."

He gave her a look from the corner of his eyes.

"Yep! They sure did! They found the space ship. Homer, Ongren really came from another planet!"

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So it *was* true, Gordon thought. Then he wasn't going to let them go free...

"They found something else, too," she went on. "They found the warehouse where the guns are kept. If we could only escape from here...?"

Gordon understood. The men were sullen, desperate, but they stood no chance in hand to hand combat against these creatures. It was going to be up to the children..No! He knew he couldn't use them. It was far too dangerous.

She felt his denial.

"I know how you feel," she said. "But don't you see? We're all doomed unless..."

"I just can't permit it," he said. "Those kids! We'll have to find some other way."

"Look, Homer!" she took hold of his arm fiercely. "Listen to me! Those guards are stupid, I said. How do you think we found out? The second night two of the kids, Harris and the little Oleson boy failed to return. Do you know the guards didn't even know they were gone? We hoped they'd found a means of escape. And do you know where they spent the night? In the space ship. The guards don't keep track of the kids. I don't think those beasts even can count."

For the first time a small ray of hope came to life in Gordon's breast. if that was the case, there was a chance. But he had to work it out carefully. There were one or two things he had to clear up with Horog, first.

He told her to wait for him, then stepped to Horog's side. She saw the two whispering, saw Gordon's face light up in a smile, and as he turned to her again, the smile was a wide grin.

"Maybe," he said, as he returned to her side, "it will work. Now, honey, Horog and I are going to be busy for the next few hours. But I'll see you later."

CHAPTER V

THE GREEN DEATH

FOR THE first time Horog and Gordon had a meal with the others. Promptly at noon, the guards were re-enforced by others. Then food was brought in, a kind of stew, which was followed by water in buckets. There was a dipper for each bucket and the prisoners used the dippers in turns.

Then, when their lunch was done, Ongren reappeared.

The first thing he did was examine the plant men. By this time there were several hundred of them. He went to each in turn, his finger probing at their green hides, his hand now and then sliding along the green trunk, feeling its smoothness. But there was a question in his eyes when he came to the two scientists.

"Well?" he said.

Gordon smiled up at him.

"Well, nothing. Do you think they are going to set up a cheering section because you walk in? They're doing all right."

"But they're still trees," Ongren said.

"They'll always be that," Gordon said.

"Human trees, damn it! The next time I come here, I want them to be moving. Hear?"

"I'll tell them," Gordon said, sourly.

"Don't try my patience too long," Ongren said in warning.

Horog spilled oil on the troubled waters:

"I think the morning will bring complete success," he said.

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Ongren gave the other a savage look, nodded his head, and left.

Horog turned and finished his meal. And Gordon knew it was time to make his plans for their escape. The guards lolled along the wall. He had made it a point to sit between and among Jeff, Sam Winthrop and a few of the others he knew. He gave them their instructions.

"This is the night," he began. "It'll have to be tonight, understand?"

They nodded gravely. And for once Jeff was silent.

"First, a little information. Hauber, which of the older boys can use a rifle?"

Hauber smiled grimly.

"All of them. Heck! Them young fellers can shoot the eyes out of a duck at a hundred yards. That's all they do is hunt during the cold months," he said.

"Good. Now which of them are the best at losing themselves in the forest?" Gordon probed.

"My young 'un and the Jepson boy are pretty good at it. Then there's young Harris and the Grey lad..."

"I THINK three will be enough," Gordon broke in. "Now here's what I have in mind. Those kids will go out this afternoon and get lost. They'll go to the warehouse or whatever it is, and get as many rifles as they can carry, or as many as we'll need. They'll wait till dark to sneak back. One of them will start a commotion to draw the guards from here and as they rush outside, they'll shoot them down. That will be our chance. With rifles, we can beat them."

It was Jeff who raised an objection:

"What good will rifles do? You yourself said these characters don't bleed..."

"They don't," Gordon agreed. "But they die, just like any of us. And from a peculiar blow. A blow across the bridge of the nose. I don't know why, but that spot seems to be their weak point. I think that it's the center of their nervous system. At any rate, I'm convinced that it's their weak point. And that's where the kids will have to aim for."

'In the dark?" Jeff said.

"They can do it," Hauber said. "If there's a moon."

"I can promise better than that," Horog suddenly spoke. "There's a system of spotlights all set up along the rim of the this place. Just let one of the boys signal when they're ready and we can give them all the illumination they need."

And suddenly the hopelessness was gone from their eyes. The terror of the past two weeks seemed to have been something which had happened in the long-ago. Now a new decision was born in their breasts. They looked at each other and as with a single accord, their lips smiled at each other.

"So I think we're set, then," Gordon said. "Go back to work and try to act as if nothing was wrong or different. Be natural."

Gordon was the last to rise. He wanted to tell Daryl something before he started in again on the injections. She rose as he came over, pushed one of the youngsters gently from her, and before he knew what had happened, he was being soundly kissed.

"I've been wanting you to do that for a long time, now," she said.

He flushed. "I guess my mind was on other things. But just as soon as we're out of here, which may be sooner than you think..."

"You mean tonight?" she was suddenly breathless.

He shook his head. "That's what I've come to tell you. Now here's the part you've got to play..."

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GORDON wasn't aware of the storm until a particularly loud clap of thunder echoed around the steel walls of the laboratory. He looked up to where the windows were set high, near the rounded roof, and saw a jagged streak of lightning shoot across the sky.

"Summer storm," Horog said. "I hope it doesn't rain."

"It can't!" Gordon said. 'It mustn't. Too much depends on it. And it's a lucky thing we've got those spotlights to use. Those kids would be lost without the moon."

"Which reminds me," Horog said. "About what time did they plan to give the signal?"

"I don't know," Gordon said. "But I think it will be rather late. Say!"

"Yes?"

"Have you noticed something odd about the specimens?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well. We figured that the effects wouldn't take hold for at least twenty-four hours. But I'll swear several of those damned things have moved in the past twenty minutes."

"Better take it easy, old man," Horog said. "You're a little high strung."

Gordon gave the other a narrowed glance. He knew that they *had* moved. There was a perceptible distance between some of those closest to the wall. But why was Horog saying, no?

The thought that he might be getting a little on the high side, occurred to him. He shook the thought off. No. As a matter of fact, he had never felt more sure of himself. Then why had Horog said that?

The plausible answer was that to Horog, the things had never moved. So it was only natural he could only see his side of it. But Gordon was sure they had.

He looked around. The evening meal had been done with a short while and the men were lolling around. He could see in them a growing tension. It was understandable. They were waiting for the signal of freedom. Gordon let his glance go to the guards along the wall, and he wondered when and if they ever slept. Certainly, he had never seen them asleep.

Suddenly one of them looked toward the plants lined against the wall. There was something so concentrated in his glance, Gordon followed with his own eyes. And he saw why the guard had stared so fixedly. There was a definite rift in the closeness of the ranks. The guard turned to his partner and said something. The other then looked also, and after looking nodded his head.

The two then strolled in casual interest toward the plant men. And as they strolled several of their friends joined them, so that there were five of the guards standing in front of the plants in question.

It happened so quickly that Gordon couldn't believe his eyes. In one second he saw the five guards in front, in the next they were completely surrounded by plant men.

HOROG and Gordon came to their feet and ran toward the struggling men. But their way was blocked by the rest of the guards who came running also to the rescue of their comrades. A couple of the brawny men stopped the two scientists with raised rifles.

The rest of the guards formed a wedge and with flailing rifles plowed deeply into the green forest. There was a flurry of blows and they reappeared with their comrades, not all of them alive. For Horog and Gordon saw that three of them were literally broken in two.

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While the two who were alive were carried to safety, the others formed a living wall between themselves and the rest in the laboratory.

"Let me to them," Horog shouted. "I know what to do."

It was fortunate that Jagar was there. He gave Horog permission and, calling Gordon to assist him, Horog leaped to one of the large tanks.

"Quick!" he whispered. "This is the quick-dry. They are still a little slow in thinking. This will let the rest catch up. By the time the signal comes..."

Gordon wasn't thinking. He merely followed Horog's direction. Dipping the bucket into the solution he ran with the other and splashed it over the balance of the plants. In three trips, working full speed, they got the whole lot sprayed.

And just as they finished the last of them, the signal sounded, the hoot of an owl.

"I'll get the switch," Horog said. "You get the men ready."

Gordon raced for his friends, who were already on the alert. There was a crashing of rifle butts on the door, then silence. The guards looked in bewilderment toward the sound. Once again Jagar gave an order, and a half dozen of them raced for the door. They leaped out and were met by drumfire shots. It was the signal for escape. Jagar started to give another order and Jeff's fist plowed a furrow down his nose. But the blow landed a trifle high and it merely staggered Jagar.

In a second he struck back. Jeff knew then that he was in a fight, and one which could only lead to death for one or the other. And such fights were being held all over the huge floor. There were, since the six guards left, as many male prisoners as there were guards. And outside, there was the sound of more firing. The men were in a frenzy. One of them went down, and another. But they did not fall alone. Here a guard screamed and fell, his hands holding his upper face, and there one screamed and fell, twisting to the floor.

Gordon had thoughts only for the women and children. With the first sound of battle he had raced to where they huddled in a group about Daryl. Shepherding them before him, he moved toward the door. The men had already known they were to fight the guards away from the door at all costs. But there was a pair fighting almost on the threshold. And just as Gordon and his flock reached the door, the fight was over.

And a blood-crazed guard faced Gordon, rifle butt raised high to deliver another death blow.

Only it didn't land where the guard had aimed it. Instead, Gordon ducked the blow, and swung the side of his palm against the man's forearm, numbing it. The guard leaped back and Gordon bored in swinging with both hands.

GORDON deliberately swung low. He wanted to lower the guard's arms. The guard on the other hand wanted only to kill Gordon. He had no science, no skill. Just a brute instinct to maim and murder. Although Gordon hurt his arm with the Judo blow, the guard knew it would be a matter of seconds and the arm would be as well as new. Right now it hung, useless by his side, but the other arm was well and could do damage. If only this Earthman would stand still. He winced as the blow took a little of the breath from him. He lowered his arm, trying to hook with his

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fingers, the stinging fist of the Earthman.

It was the last conscious act of his life.

A hammer-blow took him between the eyes, just at the bridge of his nose. It was odd how he thought of the red pastures of Carna, his home on Clasma. Maybe now he could go back there...

Gordon waved the women and children through the door, shouting as he did so:

"Hey! It's us!"

The youngsters outside were too busy, however, to pay any attention to those inside. The guards, all of them with shattered skulls, lay about in the strange attitudes death lends. But there were the other guards, the ones from the outside, who had been set to watch the green plants, and those too, who were at the warehouse and space ship. They too had come running with the first sound of gunfire.

The youngsters lay flat on the ground, not too close to each other, as if instinct had told them the best way to fight, and waited until a flash of gunfire showed them a mark. The spotlights made bright the ground for hundreds of feet around them. And they saved their fire for telling effect.

Gordon took the situation in in one glance. He saw they were in an area of some darkness, where they huddled in the shadow of the door. But a stray shot might get to one of them. Quickly, he ordered them to lie flat on the ground and crawl out of the area of fire.

He waited only long enough to see that they *had* gotten out of the fire area, before going back into the laboratory. A vivid streak of lightning made the night like day, and the first slanting rain began to fall.

The fight raged inside with unabated fury. He saw, however, that the guards were no longer as many as their opponents. In fact there were only a few left. Even as he raced to the assistance of Hauber, who was battling fiercely with a giant of a man, Hauber managed to wrest the guard's rifle from him, and with a terrific blow, shatter the man's skull.

GORDON reached for Horog. He had seen that Jeff, and Sam Winthrop were still alive, though badly battered. But the scientist was not to be seen at first. Then he spotted him.

He was calmly moving back and forth before the plant men. Gordon was too far away to either see or hear Horog. He didn't see the strange look of ecstacy in the man's face when he did turn around. But he knew something was wrong, very wrong. For Horog started to advance slowly toward the door. And with him, marched a wall of plants.

The last of the guards fell at that very instant.

"The plant men! Get them!" Gordon yelled. The realization of Horog's intent had come to him. Then shots echoed and re-echoed around the steel walls, like bells in a boiler. But these weren't human beings they were shooting at. The bullets embedded themselves in the green trunks with harmless effect. Inexorably, the monsters marched onward, Horog at their head. Weird laughter issued from the throat of the scientist and strange words from his mouth:

"The world is mine! Traitor, eh! I'll rule them all!"

Desperately, Gordon looked around for a means of stopping them. His eyes fell on the petrifying tanks.

"Quick! The tanks! Aim for 'em!"

A strange keening cry came from

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the round mouths of all the plant men as the sticky liquid poured toward them. For they were still slow in their movement, and they hadn't crossed the center of the room where the floor swept downward in a drain. The liquid flowed slowly, but faster than they could move, and in a few seconds, the first of them were engulfed to their ankles in the stuff.
faster than they could move, and in a few seconds, the first of them were engulfed to their ankles in the stuff.

In the meantime, Gordon and the rest retreated toward the door. The shooting had stopped outside. Fear and wonder as to the fate of those out there, and the sudden knowledge that they hadn't quite made good their escape, made the islanders grit their teeth for the final effort.

Hauber, the first through the door, saw the reason why the firing had stopped. The youngsters had run out of shells. And being more clever then brave, had run for their lives, with Daryl and the others. Hauber could see them at the farthest point of the clearing, his own son in the lead, calling for the others to follow, and running directly into the forest.

"They must be going toward the space ship," Gordon grunted in tired accents. "But let's get out of here. We'll be caught between two fires!"

Already the remaining guards were at the close edge of the clearing, and leaping toward them. And behind them, Horog was shouting unintelligibly for the plant men to follow him.

"Follow the kids," Gordon said, and was the first to start in their direction.

They caught them in a hundred yards, just at the very edge of the forest. Gordon turned for a last look at the sphere-shaped building, narrowing his eyes against the pelting rain. A sudden, and terrific lightning flash made him blink. When he saw clearly once more, it was to see a huge burst of flame shoot up from out of the building. The lightning had struck and penetrated to one of the tanks, setting it afire.

"Hurry," Daryl's voice called in urgent accents.

BUT GORDON wanted to see the rest of the drama. An explosion tore the air into quivering fragments of echoing frightfulness, and the roof of the building disintegrated and shot up into the rain-filled night with a thousand fiery sparks and shower of steel.

Gordon hoped that the fire and explosion had killed all those within the building. But he was doomed to disappointment. Against the glare of light, he saw Horog and at least twenty of the plant men leap from the building, as from a fiery furnace. And were met by the guards of Ongren.

Not till then did Gordon follow the others.

Up ahead, leading the procession of men, women and children, was young Hauber and the Jepson boy. Gordon could only hear them; now and then they called warnings and directions for the rest. He felt the smoothness of a path which was already rain-filled and mucky. Now and then someone stumbled and the procession halted until the unlucky one was extricated from the slime and mud. Then they would go on. And always ahead, the two boys kept up their calls.

When Gordon caught up with the rest, he found that they had just about reached their destination. All of the younger children were being carried, and most of the women were

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being supported by their men folks. He pushed his way past several to where Daryl was leaning against a tree, almost to the end of her endurance. Even Jeff, strong as he was, was beginning to feel the strain.

Gordon counted noses, and found that they were four men short. But all who were there, carried rifles. And with rifles in their hands, nothing looked dark. At least they had the means of defense. Young Jepson motioned for Gordon to come to him.

"See, sir. There!" he pointed toward a break in the trees.

Gordon followed the pointing finger with his eyes and saw an odd shaped, tear-dropped plane. It was the most advanced thing in plane design he'd ever seen, and recognized it for what it was, a ship designed to travel through space at a maximum of speed. He saw something else, also. From a path at the opposite end of the clearing a file of men came, led by Ongren.

They were closer to the ship than Gordon and the others. As they watched, Ongren and his men busied themselves in what looked like, for a few seconds, the building of fires. Then Gordon saw that they weren't making fires. Those were signal flares.

"What do we do now?" Jeff whispered hoarsely.

"Wait. That's all. I don't know why we came here, to begin with. But it seemed safer than the other section..."

"If we could get to the other side," young Hauber said, "there is a path that leads down to the boat house."

"We can't though. The first person who steps out will be outlined in those flares."

"If there were only some kind of shelter," Daryl wailed. "These kids will get their death of cold..."

"Shelter! Of course," Gordon clapped his hand to his forehead. "I'm an utter fool. Ongren's home. It's evident he's getting out of here. There's probably no one at his place. And he must have phone connections ..You two kids," he commanded, "take the women and kids up to the house. But first see whether it's empty."

"A cinch," Jepson said. "Leave it to us..."

"And the first thing you do, Daryl, is get in touch with the mainland. Have 'em send the army and navy if you have to. But get help out here, quick!"

HE WATCHED them leave, skirting the clearing edge, always out of sight yet not too far as to get lost in the thick growth. He marveled at the way the two older boys found their way about in all the muck. Then matters at hand were brought to his attention.

"I think that our friends are coming," Sam Winthrop remarked, drily.

They could hear the crashing in the brush behind them.

"We'd better get out of here," Hauber suggested. "We're right in between the two fires."

Gordon counted noses. Too few to do much damage, even with the rifles they possessed. It was retreat again. But to where? There was only the brush. But whatever and wherever it was, it had to be soon. Already the first of their pursuers was close at hand.

This time Hauber took the lead. He didn't go far, but he led them off the path where the others had to travel. And led them to where they could see without being seen.

In a few seconds after they left, Horog and the plant men came on the

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scene. There were twenty of them. And Gordon noticed that they no longer were clumsy and halting in their walk. Horog saw the flares, saw the men lined up around the ship, guns in their hands, and didn't hesitate a second.

He turned and said something to the lead plant man who shook his head and started forward at a run for the space ship. The others followed swiftly. Horog remained in the rear.

There was a fusillade of gunfire. But the bullets had no effect on the green beings. In a few seconds the two forces came to grips. The guards stood almost no chance, until Ongren, standing by the side of the ship, saw one of the plant men stumble into the flare. Ongren knew then, how to beat them.

Although Gordon and his friends could not hear Ongren's commands, they could guess what he was shouting. It didn't take long. There had been many more guards than there were the others. Those remaining rushed for the flares and shoved them into the green trunks. Twenty torches blazed there in the rain-soaked forest.

And as they blazed, Gordon saw that this was their only chance to get Ongren and the others.

"Get 'em!" he shouted, and started off a general shooting.

More than half of Ongren's forces fell with the first round of fire. Gordon saw the startled look on the handsome face. He aimed deliberately for the spot just above the staraight nose, and pulled the trigger. But at that very instant, one of the guards stepped directly into the path of the bullet. It gave Ongren a chance. Calling to the others to join him, he opened the door of the ship and leaped in, the rest following.

There was a wild scream of rage from Horog, as the door closed on them, and he raced to the center of the clearing, and shook a futile fist at the slowly rising plane.

Gordon was not the superstitious kind, but he found himself crossing his fingers, as he watched the space ship ascend.

"Aah!" the cry was wrenched from Jeff.

For suddenly, and for no apparent reason, the ship turned its rounded front earthward, and plunged the hundred feet it had risen, to the ground. The crash was accompanied by a tremendous explosion and fire. It was the end of Ongren...and of Horog too. For he had been directly below the ship, and had no time to leap to safety.

* * *

"WELL, Doc," Jeff said, as he watched Stockton prepare the cruiser for their new fishing trip, "think we'll get some fishing in, this time? A fine holiday we've had."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Gordon said. He put his arm around Daryl Winthrop. "I came for a vacation... and found a wife. Who could ask for anything more?"

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LIGHTNING LOOT

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By WARREN KASTEL

Robbing the bank was all a matter of timing, and in the getaway speed was very essential — a speed too fast to be seen . . .

"STRIKING like bolts of lightning out of the sky, the mysterious band of criminals known appropriately as 'The Lightning Gang' appeared this morning at the Township Bank in Wilkerston and escaped with close to $40,000 in cash. Virgil Pitkus, 51, a watchman in the bank, was killed in the act of drawing his gun.

"Like those preceding, the robbery was characterized by the extreme rapidity with which the robbers were able to move about. Witnesses again failed to note any important details of feature or dress, merely describing the desperadoes as 'blurs of motion'. Governor Holwin announced that he has taken the matter up with police authorities, and that drastic measures will be—"

Sheriff Amos Barr slapped the

The doors of the bank burst open, and as the people outside stared in amazement a blur of rushing figures sped past them.

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newspaper together with explosive energy. "Bah!" he snorted. "Drastic measures! Makes me sick. Bet the only measure Holwin's taken is to hide his loose cash under a floorboard. Murder and robbery on every hand—and what protection do we get? Drastic measures, Hmmph!"

Inky Laird tossed away a mangled toothpick and grinned sympathetically. "Uh, huh. But coming from you, Sheriff, that's heresy. Don't forget you're an officer duly sworn to uphold the law."

"Don't remind me!" Sheriff Barr, snapped. Then he groaned and his plump figure sagged into the chair as the full weight of his office and its duties once more settled upon him. "Darn you, Inky, this is all your fault! You knew very well that I didn't really want to be a sheriff."

"Then why were you making all those speeches at election time?" Inky Laird inquired, his eyebrows raised satirically.

Barr studied a palm intently. "We-e-l-l, the truth of the matter is that I like to make speeches. But darn you a thousand times, Inky, you didn't have to go and support me with editorials in that advertising circular you call a newspaper."

"Advertising circular! Why, it's the finest tabloid sheet of its kind in the country!" Laird shifted indignantly. The Aderville Courier may have been small and its main source of income might be from advertising, but it was still a newspaper. And that fact meant more to Inky Laird than anything else in the world. Maybe except for Trudy Barr. She was the youngest of the Sheriff's three pretty daughters, and Inky entertained hopes for her as high as he did for the circulation of his newspaper.

"Well, it's too late to do anything now," Barr said dolefully. "If I tried to resign, my daughters would murder me. That's gratitude for you, Inky. They don't care if I die an untimely and violent death, just so they can go around bragging that their old man's a sheriff." He shook his head and propped his feet up on the desk, fumbling in his vest for a cigar. In the act of lighting it, he stopped suddenly and stared at Inky.

"Say! Did they put you up to it?"

"Huh? Oh, no! Not at all. You see, you're highly respected around town, and at election time I got to talking with some of the men and they said they thought it would be a good idea if you got elected instead of Heglund. He isn't as popular as you are, and besides, he couldn't even catch a cold."

Mollified, Barr lighted the cigar. But his contentment left him with the first puff of smoke.

"Inky—we have a bank here in town. What if—suppose...."

INKY LAIRD avoided the Sheriff's stricken gaze. "Yeah, yeah, I've been doing some worrying about it, too," he muttered. "Wilkerston's less than twenty miles from here, and for all we know the Lightning Gang may have us slated for their next haul."

"What—what're we going to do Inky? You've got to help me: you're the one who got me elected."

"Well, you've got enough rifles here in the jail. Why don't you deputize some of the men who hang around Pete's garage, give them the rifles, and then post them around the bank. They can pepper the robbers if they show up."

"That's not a bad idea at all. I'll think it over." The Sheriff stuck the cigar back between his teeth and tried to look grim. He had seen lawmen in the movies, and they always looked grim when thinking over a weighty problem.

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Inky Laird didn't have to exert himself to look grim. He felt like a veritable personification of the word. He realized more forcefully now that he had made a vast mistake. As a mere member of society, Amos Barr met every requirement. But as a sheriff, a protector of society, he was sadly wanting.

That fact opened up a whole vista of hitherto unforeseen troubles to Inky Laird. One of them was that the Sheriff's incompetence might lead the Barr name to disgrace. Another that he might become a repository for an unhealthy number of gangster bullets. But in any event the full blame would come to rest on Inky's slender shoulders, and Trudy's feelings for him would undergo a circulation loss to zero.

Darn those crooks, anyway!" Barr grumbled. "Why couldn't they rob banks natural and normal, the way banks should be robbed? It ain't fair to us guardians of law and order, Inky." He pulled bitterly at the cigar. "What gets me, though," he went on, "is how they are able to move so fast. It just shouldn't be possible."

Inky Laird shrugged. "I agree with you, but the fact that The Lightning Gang has robbed almost a dozen banks without even being seen shows that it is."

"But what I want to know is how? Not even the quickest athlete is as fast as they are."

"Well, you've got me there. Nobody knows exactly why the robbers get around like greased lightning. Some scientists think it's because they use something called an accelerator drug."

"I read about it," said the Sheriff, gesturing with his cigar. "Sounds pretty fantastic, though. Like inventing some chemical to make yourself invisible."

"I like the idea," Inky mused. "Think of what a story it would make."

But Barr was blind to the possibilities. He worried at the cigar like a dog worries at a bone, and his ruddy face was beginning to show vestiges of its first wrinkles.

"Inky, there's something I wish for more than anything else in the world right now."

"Yeah? What's that, Sheriff?"

"I wish we didn't have a bank here in Alderville. Oh, why, oh, why don't those darn crooks pick on banks in the big cities? It ain't fair, that's what it is."

"The Lightning Gang did start with banks in the big cities," Inky pointed out. "But after several jobs it got too hot for them. The banks just installed a couple more safety devices, increased the number of bank dicks, and that was that. About all we can do is buy machine guns and load them with buckshot. We don't have the facilities of the banks in the larger cities to fend off this gang with new safeguards. So you can see just what sort of a problem we're up against here. And in the final analysis I doubt if buckshot would would be the answer to our problem."

INKY LAIRD directed his gloomy gaze out the office window. The fact that the window was clean and sparkling and decorated with crisp, white curtains didn't help any. The curtains were but one result of the hours that Sheriff Barr's three daughters spent in tidying up the office. To the uninitiated, that office, at first glance, somewhat resembled a boudoir.

Presently, Inky brightened and straightened up. On the opposite side of the street, a small figure was hur-

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rying toward the office. That lithe and swinging step was unmistakable.

"Trudy's coming," Inky said. "It's about time, too. She wants me to drive her up to Bellview to look at some dresses. Got a sale, or something." He looked out of the window again and scowled. The girl had stopped and was talking to a tall, distinguished-looking man dressed in impeccable clothes. She looked and acted like she had come into a chance meeting with Clark Gable.

Barr craned his neck in the direction of Inky's black gaze.

"Uh," he said. "It's that Fosman guy. Dr. Irving Fosman. He runs a private sanitarium in the old Chaddon mansion."

"The stiff-necked pill tosser!" Inky muttered.

"He's a bit of a mystery," the Sheriff said. "Nobody seems to know much about him."

Inky nodded shortly. His face was one, big frown. "Yeah. Couple of months ago one of our nosey women's clubs talked me into interviewing Fosman. That was the only way they could learn anything about him worth gossiping about, without grabbing him by the neck and putting him to the third degree directly. Anyway, I could have written a book about what I didn't learn."

"Secretive, huh?"

"Not exactly that. He's as nice as honey, but as evasive as a greased pig. Honestly, Sheriff, I've never met a man who could reply so courteously, patiently, and lengthily to questions without really answering them, as Fosman."

Barr was interested to the point of removing the cigar from his mouth.

"What sort of a place has he got? I mean, what does it look like inside?"

"Oh, something like a hospital. White paint, beds, and wheelchairs, and things. But you ought to see the patients he's got!" Inky shivered reminiscently. "They were as skinny as so many skeletons, and they shook so bad it looked like they were trying to do a bed version of the shimmy."

"As bad as that, huh?"

"Worse. From what I saw, they were plenty sick, and certainly needed a sanitarium." Inky looked out the window with an anxious frown. He found some comfort in the fact that Fosman seemed to be in a hurry. The private sanitarium owner was holding his hat in his hands and murmuring some farewell platitudes. Then he replaced the hat, turned, and strode to a dark coupe which was parked not far distant. He got in and drove away. Trudy was already walking toward the office, and Inky was trying to get his face smoothed out into something entirely cool and nonchalant.

That was when it happened.

Trudy had her hand on the office door. But then something caught her attention and her head turned. Her eyes widened. Her hand went to her throat.

"Dad!" she cried. "The bank!"

For a moment Inky and the Sheriff sat there staring at her, their features blank with surprise and incomprehension. Then the words took on meaning. Together they leaped for the door. Inky got it open. They looked down the street.

IT WAS almost noon. The warmth of the sun was drying the traces of a light rain that had taken place earlier that morning. A warm breeze stirred restlessly, carrying the sharp odor of exhaust fumes. There was the sound of a running motor.

Ordinarily, the street would have

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been lazy and casual. But now there was a tenseness about it, an unusual strangeness.

Here and there, townspeople stood about in attitudes of petrified stillness. Doors squeaked open, and heads craned from shops and stores. Voices began rising in questions of alarm.

Over all was the somehow ominous sound of a running motor. It belonged to a black sedan drawn up before the doors of the bank.

"The Lightning Gang!" Barr husked. "They're robbing the bank! What're we going to do, Inky? What're we going to do?"

Inky swiveled his head around to the Sheriff. It wasn't that Barr was afraid. He was just a man in shoes that were too big for him. He was facing a problem that should have been no greater than finding a way to get out to a poker game with the boys on a Saturday night.

Inky thought he knew what had to be done. He pulled Trudy into the office and barked, "Stay here!"

"But, Inky, what are you going to do?"

No answer came from between his white lips. He took a rifle down from the rack on one wall and pumped a bullet into the chamber.

"Inky—no!"

She leaped to him and clutched at his arm, her eyes wide and filled with a glittering fear. She was learning that a badge and title are not all gold and glory. They can mean death, too.

There was no time for words. Inky placed the girl firmly into a chair, then he dove for the door, shoving the Sheriff out into the street.

"Come on!" he rapped.

The bank was diagonally across the street, at a distance of less than two hundred yards. Inky and the Sheriff pounded toward it. But before they reached it, the Lightning Gang flashed from the doors.

No other word describes the rapidity with which they erupted from the bank. It wasn't just that they were running; they were moving so fast that the eye could barely follow them. It was like a motion picture film speeded up to the point where the movements of the actors become blurs.

The doors of the black sedan opened and shut. The hum of the motor rose to a roar. With ever increasing speed, the car moved off down the street, clouds of exhaust smoke billowing out behind it.

Inky dropped to one knee. He began firing as fast as he could pull the trigger and pump the lever of the rifle. By the time the sedan had become an impossible target, Inky was certain that he had made at least one hit.

The town was now definitely awakened into life. People came running from every direction like suddenly animated statues. There was the pounding of feet and the swelling hubub of excited voices.

Inky and the Sheriff pushed their way past the growing crowd about the doors and entered the bank. Spellin, the owner, hurried forward to meet them. His sharp face showed that whatever he had on his mind was nothing good.

"You're a fine sheriff!" he snapped wrathfully. "You should have been on guard. You should have known that the crooks would appear."

Barr was too dazed by the sudden, chaotic rush of events to make a reply. He blinked at Spellin and fumbled with a coat lapel.

Inky stepped forward.

"I know how you must feel about what just happened," he said levelly. "But take it easy just the same. The Sheriff knew that your bank would

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probably be robbed, but neither he nor I thought the Lightning Gang would attempt it so soon after the Wilkerston job."

"That makes no difference! Some precautions should have been taken just the same. Oh, I won't forget this! With my influence—"

"You might be jumping to conclusions," Inky broke in. "Why not check up and find out just how much was taken?"

Spellin's eyes widened. He nodded quickly and hurried away.

"Keep the crowd out," Inky told Barr, in a low voice. "I'm going to look for a 'phone.'"

HE FOUND one in Spellin's private office, and got the State highway police on the wire. He told them of the robbery and advised that every road leading from Alderville be watched. Immediate action was promised.

Inky returned to the Sheriff. Barr had gotten everyone out of the bank, except two friends whom he thought would be of help. These were Nick Stanistos, who owned the drugstore directly across from the bank, and Doc Halleck, who had an office above the drugstore.

Stanistos let out a shout. He was pointing into one of the teller's cages.

"It's young Bailey! I—I think he's dead!"

But Bailey wasn't dead, as Doc Halleck reported after a short examination. The young teller had merely been knocked unconscious from a blow on the temple. Halleck quickly brought him around.

"What happened, Jack?" Inky inquired, dropping down beside Bailey.

"Oh—that you, Inky? Lord, you should have seen those guys—I mean, you should have seen them if they could be seen. Fast? Wow!"

"But what happened?" Inky prompted.

"One of them hit me with something—a gun, I think. I don't know. I was sorting currency, when I heard a car stop. Then the door opened, and I looked up. Gosh, I thought something had gone wrong with my eyes! There were about four of them, I think, and they were all over the bank even before the door had closed. I—I wasn't exactly scared, but those guys were so fast you didn't even have time to think. One of them swarmed over the top of my cage and hit me. Yeah, it's the truth."

"I know," Inky said. "That's their usual method of attack." He glanced up as Spellin appeared. The banker was wiping his face with a handkerchief.

"I've checked over everything," Spellin said. "Those damn crooks have taken slightly over $30,000."

"Huh! You were lucky." Inky stood up, and helped Jack Bailey to his feet.

"Lucky?" Spellin glared. "You must remember that I wouldn't have lost anything, if we had a competent sheriff on the job."

Barr reddened. "Yeah? And you must remember that the towns in which other banks have been robbed had lawmen, too."

Spellin's lips closed whitely. Then they opened, and his eyes showed that something quite vitriolic would be on the menu.

But Barr had quite recuperated from his shocks.

"That's enough!" he roared. "Any more from you, and I'll jail you for contempt of an officer!" He didn't know if there was such a law on the books. But it impressed Spellin. The banker shut up.

And then Doc Halleck began walking away from them. His head was bent forward a little, and his eyes

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were fixed on some point on the floor.

Inky saw it, too. He had followed Halleck's intent gaze.

"Easy!" he said. He ran forward and stooped over something that glittered in fragments upon the marble flooring.

"It—It's a hypodermic!" Doc Halleck gasped.

"Right," Inky said softly. "And look, Doc, something has spilled out of it."

Halleck bent down and sniffed cautiously at the syrupy, amber liquid in which the glass shards lay. He shook his head.

The others had come up by now. They were staring curiously.

Inky looked up at Barr with eyes that gleamed.

"Sheriff, remember what I said back in the office—about the Lightning Gang using an accelerator drug? Somehow, one of them has dropped a hypodermic containing just such a thing while robbing the bank. I may be wrong, of course, but it's a darned good guess.

"Doc, do you think you and Stanistos could make an analysis of this stuff?"

"I don't know, but we can try."

"I'll go run and get a medicine dropper for collecting it," Stanistos said. He returned shortly, and enough of the amber liquid was collected to fill half of a small vial. That done, Inky carefully gathered up the glass fragments, separating the dry ones from those that had lain in the liquid. He and Barr returned to the latter's office.

TRUDY was waiting for them. Her sigh of relief showed that she had been doing a lot of worrying.

Inky explained just enough to satisfy the girl's curiousity. Then he gently but firmly steered her out the door.

"Got a lot of work to do," he apologized. "I'll see you later."

She left, looking awed.

"What luck!" Inky gloated, excitedly pacing the floor. "We're the only ones so far who've gotten a single clue. If we can bust up the Lightning Gang, think of what a scoop it'll be for the Alderville Courier! I'll have the jump on every newspaper in the country."

"Yeah, but I don't see how we're going to do that," Barr said dubiously.

"We've got a couple good leads," Inky pointed out. "There's the drug or whatever it is for one. If we find out just what it is, bank police can be injected, and the Lightning Gang will meet with serious competition. Then there's the hypodermic. It might have fingerprints on it. And that reminds me. I'm going to have the pieces sent to Washington and let Federal Bureau of Investigation experts go over it. They can check up on any discoveries in their files."

With circulation figures whirling around in his head, Inky got busy. The pieces of the broken hypodermic were carefully dispatched on their journey.

Later that afternoon, Doc Halleck and Nick Stanistos dropped into the Sheriff's office to report their results. They looked tired and glum.

"No soap," Halleck sighed. "Me and Nick here know our medicines, and Nick's a bit of a chemist, but whatever this stuff is, it's a bit too complicated for us. We tried every trick we know, but about all we could find out is that the stuff has got adrenalin in it. A lot of adrenalin. Concentrated, or something."

"Do you think it's a drug that accelerates muscular movements?" Inky

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asked.

"If you mean is it the stuff the Lightning Gang uses, I think it is. In fact, I'm positive."

Inky seated himself on a corner of the Sheriff's desk and lighted a cigarette. He stared into space, his mind seeking among the fragments of a college course in physiology.

"Adrenalin," he muttered. "An adaptation by nature to increase the activity of the animal during times of danger—the fight or flight secretion. It stimulates heart action to increase the flow of blood to the muscles. But, Doc, adrenalin alone couldn't have the effect of increasing the speed of bodily movement to such a high degree as that in the Lightning Gang. It merely provides for an increased flow of blood to the muscles in times of greater activity."

"Right," said Halleck. "It's the part of the drug that me and Nick failed to break up that does that. The adrenalin part just increases heart action, and consequently blood flow. The faster a man moves, the more blood his muscles need."

"That other part," Inky said. "I'll have to get an expert chemical analyst to find out what it is. I was thinking of having bank policemen injected with the drug so that they could move just as fast as the Lightning Gang."

"Oh, there isn't anymore left," Stanistos said. "There wasn't much in the first place, and me and Doc used that all up."

"Damn!" said Inky, biting his lip. "Well, thanks anyway."

Halleck and Stanistos left, looking guilty.

Inky got the State Highway Police headquarters on the telephone and asked if any trace of the black sedan had been found. But, according to the answer he received, it had vanished into thin air. Every available man had been sent out, every road leading from Alderville within a radius of ten miles had been watched. But the black sedan had not been seen.

"Which means," Inky muttered, replacing the receiver, "that the robbers hadn't gone very far from here." He grew very thoughtful. As the minutes ticked away, his eyes slowly widened. A glitter entered into them.

Inky got off the desk. He looked excited.

"Sheriff, I'm going to see Doc Halleck. Be right back."

Inky found the old medico, preparing to lock up his office for the day.

"Wait, Doc," he requested. "I'd like to see you for a few minutes."

"Huh? Oh. Come on in." Halleck placed his hat upon the dusty medical tomes which stood upon his battered, roll-top desk. "What is it?"

"Look, Doc, what would be the effects upon a man of such a drug as the Lightning Gang uses?"

"Well, most likely it would play hell with his system. I've got an idea now that the drug also involves a very high basal metabolism rate. That would make a man literally burn up his food faster than he could get it down his gullet. And as for his nerves —well, they'd be shot to pieces."

A grimly triumphant smile had grown about Inky's mouth. He gripped Halleck's arm.

"Thanks immensely, Doc. That's just what I wanted to know."

"But why—" Halleck began.

Inky was already out of the door. "Watch my paper!" he tossed back.

LATE IN the afternoon of the following day, Inky received a telegram from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He was in his newspaper office when it came.

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Inky read the telegram, then chewed a lip in disappointment. It wasn't as helpful as he had expected it to be.

Fingerprints had been found on several pieces of the broken hypodermic, fingerprints belonging to two different men. The most plentiful were those of one Thomas Marquand, alias Henry Snellman, who was wanted in several States for bank robbery. The other prints had been identified as those of Walter F. Irvine, a biochemist who was wanted for questioning into the death of Alexander Norrel, his laboratory assistant. Norrel, it seemed, had died in convulsions from the effects of some strange, new poison. The fact that the biochemist had disappeared at about the same time had given the case a highly suspicious tinge.

Frowning, Inky laid the telegram aside. He lighted a cigarette and walked to the window. He stared out into the street, his eyes narrowed with the intensity of his thinking.

A clock ticked busily on one wall. From beyond the office came the low rumble of running presses.

Abruptly, Inky whirled around and returned to his desk. He read the telegram again, his eyes glittering.

"It fits," he told the ashtray, as he extinguished his cigarette. "It all fits." He put on his hat and coat and and went to see Sheriff Barr.

The Sheriff listened with an interest that brought his jaw slowly down to the knot of his tie. By the time Inky finished, he looked as though he had been sandbagged.

"But—but he just can't be, Inky!" Barr gasped. "And anyway, what proof have you got?"

"There's the car, for one, and his fingerprints for another. If I'm wrong about the car, we can always get his fingerprints."

"Yeah, yeah." The Sheriff looked unhappy. "What's your plan?"

Inky unconsciously lowered his voice. "We'll drive out some time after midnight and see if the car is there. If it is, we'll return here and put in a call for the State Police. There's too many for us to tackle alone."

"All right," said Barr. "Darn it!" he added. "Why did I ever allow myself to get elected anyway?"

THERE WAS the high, zither-like sound of singing crickets, and faint with distance came the moan of a train whistle. A cool breeze that was fresh with the odor of moist grass made rustling noises in the leaves of the trees under which Inky had parked his roadster. He peered out into the darkness, then consulted the luminous dial of his wristwatch.

"I guess it's all right to go now," he said softly. "We've waited long enough."

Barr's bulk stirred.

"Well, let's get it over with."

Inky reached over and opened the dash compartment. He took out a flashlight. Then he felt into one of the pockets of his jacket. The .38 was there.

"Come on," he said.

They left the car and started across the concrete. Shortly, the stones of a gravel road were crunching beneath their heels. They walked with every attempt to make as little noise as possible.

The outlines of a house took on solidarity against the darkness. It was a very large, old house, and had once been a mansion.

But now it served as a private sanitarium for Dr. Irving Fosman.

"The garage is to the right, around the rear," Inky whispered to Barr. "Careful now."

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Further progress along the gravel road led them presently to a smaller bulk. It was a garage. They found a door just around the side.

Inky fumbled into a pocket and brought out a key.

"Lucky old Binkley kept several extra keys to the place," he remarked. "That's at least one asset to his almost nonexistent abilities as a caretaker."

"Had a hell of a time getting it from him," Barr growled. "He knows I'm the Sheriff, but he acted like I intended to burglarize the place."

Inky got the key in the lock and turned. He and Barr stepped into the pitch-black, redolent interior of the garage. Closing the door carefully behind him, Inky turned on the flashlight.

The beam revealed that there were three cars in the garage. One of them was Fosman's dark coupe. The second was a big touring car. The third could not be seen, for it was covered with a tarpaulin.

Inky's swift intake of breath was loud in the silence. He took quick steps forward. He lifted one end of the heavy cloth.

The beam of the flashlight was reflected from the body of a black sedan.

"You were right!" Barr gulped. "Good lord, let's get out of here and call the State Police."

'Wait!" Inky hissed. "We have to make sure this is the car." He worked his way around to the tail trunk and carefully moved the flashlight beam around it, searching. He gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"This is the car, all right. Look, see this bullet hole? Here—there's another just under the bumper. I made these with the rifle while the robbers were making their getaway from the bank."

"That," said a voice from the door, "was a mistake on your part, brother."

Inky and the Sheriff whipped around, appalled. Simultaneously, three flashlight beams concentrated their blinding glare upon them.

"Don't try anything, you two," one of the three men advised tightly. "You're covered." The muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun was placed in the beam of one of the flashlights.

THERE WAS a click, and the interior of the garage was flooded with light. Inky and Barr could now see their captors.

Two of the three men looked as though they had jammed themselves hastily into their clothes. The other had moisture on his shoes and a heavy jacket which showed that he had been patrolling the grounds.

"Uh—it's the hick sheriff from town!" the man with the jacket grunted. His tone of voice showed that it was anything but a pleasant surprise.

"This is bad, Frick," one of the hastily dressed men put in. "They're wise. We'd better let the Boss handle this."

"Right!" Frick agreed grimly. "Search 'em first."

"You—you can't do this!" Barr protested. "I'm a sheriff. I—I represent the Law."

"Hell, I don't care if you're the President himself," Frick said. "You know too much."

Inky and the Sheriff had their weapons removed from them. Then they were shoved unceremoniously out the door and marched up to the house. They were placed under guard in the library.

"I'll go up and get the Boss," Frick said. "Keep an eye on 'em."

He returned several minutes later. With him was Fosman. The private sanitarium owner didn't look very distinguished in pajamas and dress-

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ing gown.

"You can go," Fosman told the two who had been watching Inky and the Sheriff. "But stay up. I might need you later."

"Did you call him?" Frick wanted to know.

Fosman nodded. "He'll be down in ten minutes. This is delicate, and I need advice." He swung around to Inky and the Sheriff.

"This is unfortunate, gentlemen. I understand that you've traced the car used by the so-called Lightning Gang here. That shows you know quite a bit. May I ask how much?"

"Would it help if we said nothing?" Inky asked levelly.

"Very little, I'm afraid. The very fact that you've managed to trace the car here is—well, pretty bad."

"All right, then." Inky spoke through thinned lips. "You'll remember that I was here for an interview a few months ago. I didn't learn a hell of a lot, but I did see some things which stuck in my memory. Notably your patients.

"When the bank in Alderville was robbed yesterday, one of the Lightning Gang dropped a hypodermic syringe. That showed they were using some sort of drug to give themselves their rapidity of motion. Just what this drug was, we weren't able to find out, except for the fact that it contained adrenalin. But it was pretty certain that this drug would make a man thin, nervous, and highly irritable.

"Also, State Highway Police were on the lookout for the getaway car almost immediately after the robbery took place. Every road leading from Alderville was covered, but the car wasn't seen. That showed that it couldn't have gone very far from town.

"The effects that the accelerator drug would have upon a man reminded me of your patients. And the fact that the robbers couldn't have gone very far after looting the bank showed they had a hideout somewhere near Alderville. I thought of your sanitarium—and this tied up neatly with your patients. All of which led to the conclusion that your 'sanitarium' was nothing more or less than a hideout for the Lightning Gang."

Fosman's eyes were narrowed and intent. His lips were working slowly.

"But I had to be certain," Inky went on. "I had to see if the black sedan used by the Lightning Gang was on the sanitarium grounds. It was—and is. The fact that there are two bullet holes in it made by me shows it can be no other car."

"Damn!" Frick breathed. His eyes were very cold. His grip tightened about the sawed-off shotgun.

"A very nice series of deductions," Fosman said, with a pale attempt at lightness. "Is that all you know?"

INKY gripped hard at the arms of his chair to keep his hands from trembling. He had committed himself deeply in an effort to gain time. Little more harm could be done by telling the rest.

There was death in the room. Inky could feel it. And he could see it in the faces of Frick and Fosman.

Barr could feel it, too. All the ruddiness had gone out of his face, and his breathing was heavy.

"There were fingerprints on the hypodermic syringe," Inky said. "From two different men. One of them is Thomas Marquand—or Henry Snellman, as he might prefer to be known. I suppose he's one of your 'patients.' The other is you, Fosman."

"What! How did you—"

"Your name isn't Fosman. It's Walter F. Irvine. You used to be a biochemist, but you took to tall timber

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when your laboratory assistant died from poisoning. The police would still like to know how and why that happened."

Fosman's face had darkened. He darted a swift glance at Frick. A veil seemed to drop over Frick's eyes.

Then a bell rang.

"It's him," Fosman said. "Let him in."

Frick left the room. Somehow, he gave the impression of being a man who had learned something that was going to be of great value to him in the future.

Fosman—or Irvine, since he hadn't tried to deny it—took an automatic from out the pocket of his dressing gown. It trembled in his hand.

"You fool!" he snarled at Inky. He added several sentences of unprintable things. He was very mad. "God, how you've messed things up for me!"

Frick returned. With him was—

Inky and Barr jerked erect in their chairs. Their eyes widened in incredulous disbelief.

For with Frick was Spellin.

The banker took the scene in at a glance. His sharp face seemed to grow sharper. He jerked his head at Frick.

"Get out," he said. He turned to Irvine. "What's this all about? I didn't get much from your telephone call."

"All hell's broken loose," Irvine answered savagely. "These two know everything—everything, I tell you!" He explained rapidly. "And now Frick knows my real identity," he concluded. "He might take it into his head to use that knowledge in a bad way sometime."

"Frick will be taken care of in due time," Spellin promised harshly. "And as for these two snoopers—'dead men tell no tales'."

"You're the one behind this, Spellin?" Inky demanded. "I don't get it."

"Don't you? Well, a little more information won't hurt with what you know already. Short and sweet, the story is that I speculated with bank funds and was wiped out. It was either replace them or go to jail, and I could afford to do neither. Irvine, here, offered me a solution. I had been financing his experiments, among other things. He came to me when Norrel, his laboratory assistant, died from an overdose of the accelerator drug. It was an accident, wasn't it Walt?"

Irvine nodded darkly. "An oversight on my part," he growled. "But it would be a delicate matter to explain to the police, and I didn't want anyone to learn of the drug."

"Anyway," Spellin continued, "the accelerator drug opened up a good many nice possibilities. We took advantage of one of the most lucrative of them. We decided to go in for bank robbery. It isn't so bad once you get used to it.

"Vic Chaddon owned this house last. It was pretty heavily mortgaged, and I foreclosed when he wasn't able to pay up on time. It's made a good hideout, and since the men require medical attention, it's also a sanitarium of sorts. We elaborated that fact a bit and used it for a blind. It's fooled a lot of people. Satisfied now?"

"Almost," Inky replied. "How does this accelerator drug of yours work, Irvine?"

"I've had enough of this!" Irvine snarled. "What do you intend to do, Spellin?"

"Why not oblige them first, Walt?"

IRVINE'S face got sullen. "The action of the drug is complicated. It greatly increases physical vigor and mental alertness for a temporary

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time. It also stimulates the senses to a high point. It does this by increasing neuro-muscular reaction, lowering the resistance between the synapses in the brain, and raising the basal metabolism rate. The adrenalin part about which you've managed to learn things about a synchronization between energy supply and consumption by increasing heart action."

"I see." Inky gave the barest of nods. His eyes burned and they moved very quickly in his white, drawn face. Beneath his clothing, his muscles were bunched in quivering knots. "Well, what are you going to do with us, Spellin? Not murder? That isn't bank robbery, you know."

Spellin grinned thinly. "I know. But the returns in this game are big, Laird. And the possibilities of the accelerator drug haven't been exhausted yet. Bank robbery was just one of them. I've got ideas for bigger and better things. Compared to them bank robbery is just a minor crime. But enough of this." He gestured to Irvine. "Watch them, Walt."

Spellin went to the door and called for Frick. The other appeared shortly.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Got a job for you and a couple of the boys. These two snoopers will have to be gotten rid of. I've got it planned out so it'll look like an accident. Walt here will give them a shot of something to put them out. They've got a car parked up the road near the entrance to the driveway. We'll put them in the car and then run them up to the bridge over the river near the railroad tracks. Then we'll run the car over the bridge. It'll look like Laird lost the wheel, crashed into the guard rail, and went over."

Frick hefted his sawed-off shotgun, grinning wolfishly. "It'll be a cinch," he said.

"Get out your sleeping tablets, or whatever you've got," Spellin told Irvine. Then, angrily: "For God's sake, Walt, snap into it! We're in too deep to be squeamish about murder."

The biochemist stalked out the door. He was biting his lips to keep them from quivering against his teeth.

"There's one thing I don't understand yet, Spellin," Inky said. "Why did you have your own bank robbed?"

Spellin shrugged. "To keep up appearances. I thought somebody might get suspicious if I wasn't robbed sooner or later. Besides, there was some profit to it."

Irvine returned with a bottle and a handful of surgical cotton. Spellin moved to one side, near the Sheriff. Irvine approached Inky. He did it in such a way that, for the barest of moments, he was between Inky and the shotgun-holding Frick.

Inky's muscles had been drawn tighter than an over-wound steel spring. Now he flared into frantic, desperate action. His legs drew up—lashed out. Irvine went flying backward to collide with Frick. Simultaneously, there was a crash of sound—and a thin scream.

Sheer reflex action had made Frick fire both barrels of his gun into Irvine.

"Come on, damn it!" Inky shouted at Barr. He dove for the door.

The Sheriff had been hugging his chair in a sort of hypnotic state. The sudden burst of action now broke it. He hurled up, bowling over Spellin.

THE MANSION was awakening into chaotic life. Doors slammed on the floors above, and feet pounded on the stairs. Voices were raised in alarmed questions.

Inky and Barr were plummeting down the hall that led from the li-

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brary. Behind them someone was shooting wildly. An open doorway suddenly presented itself. Inky shoved the Sheriff into it, then hurled the door shut.

His back pressed against the wall, he looked around. Lights were burning in the ceiling. They gleamed from the bottles that lined the walls and were reflected brightly from the glass apparatus that stood on the long, white tables. All this, and the penetrating odor of chemicals told that the room was a laboratory.

Inky's eyes lighted in realization. This was Irvine's laboratory. It was from here that the biochemist had obtained a bottle and the cotton. Irvine had left the door open—the only door along the whole hall. It was hardly sheer chance that had directed Inky and Barr into it.

From beyond the door, Spellin's voice cried: "Come out of there, Laird, or it'll go harder with you!"

Taut silence followed. The Sheriff's breathing was loud. There was the shift, scrape, and buzz of excited men.

Inky's eyes were darting about the room, searching among the bottles and the glassware. Of a sudden, he released a low cry and ran to a white cabinet that stood in a corner on the opposite side of the laboratory. Here, spread out on a cloth, were a row of gleaming hypodermic needles. All were precisely one-fourth filled with an amber liquid.

"The accelerator drug!" Inky clipped. "I'd know the color anywhere. Irvine must always have kept some in readiness."

Again Spellin's voice: "Are you two coming out? You can't get away."

"Roll up your sleeve!" Inky rapped at Barr. He snatched up one of the hypodermics. The Sheriff gave a little gasp as the needle bit into his arm. Inky pressed the plunger in—and the hypodermic was empty. His hands quivering with urgency, he repeated the process on himself.

"I'm going to give you until ten to come out," Spellin snarled. He began counting.

And, as each number was told off, an amazing change came over Inky and the Sheriff. Their vision grew keener, their hearing more acute. A growing glow of energy began spreading throughout their bodies until they felt immensely well and vigorous. A tremendous strength and vitality rippled through their muscles. They began swaying from side to side, their fists opening and clenching, as though possessed of something that simply had to be spent in action. They were like race horses taut for the signal at the post, like hounds straining on a leash.

"Let me at 'em, Inky!" the Sheriff breathed. "Let me at 'em!"

Spellin finished counting. He waited. Then: "All right, boys, break the door down!" he rapped.

THERE were preliminary movements in the hall outside. The bottles that lined the laboratory began dancing to the thud of bodies against the door.

Inky stepped forward. It looked as though he had taken a sudden, startled jumped. He took a ring stand from off one of the tables.

"Get ready," he told Barr. "I'm going to open the door, and when I do, pile into them."

To an ordinary man, the commands would have been unintelligible, so fast did they come.

Barr flashed to a chair and broke off one of the legs with all the ease and rapidity that he usually would have broken a toothpick.

"I'm ready," he said eagerly. "Let

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me at 'em, Inky."

Inky went to the door. That fact was obvious only when he stopped, with his hand on the knob. He drew back the bolt, then waited, until the men in the hall gathered themselves for another thrust. He knew exactly when their bodies would come hurtling, for to his ears they seemed to be moving with the slow precision of automatons.

The painfully leisurely pound of feet approached the door. At the right instant, Inky tore it open.

Two men floated grotesquely into the laboratory, their features twisted in surprise. Actually, of course, they were moving very fast. But that word is relative. To Inky and Barr, they seemed to come drifting in.

The Sheriff released a whoop and closed in with his chair leg. The two men were unconscious even before they touched the floor.

The others in the hall were frozen by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the action. Before they could recover themselves and begin to attack, Inky felled three of them with the ring stand.

"Look out!" Spellin screamed. "They've injected themselves with the drug!"

But it was like warning statues from the path of a hurricane. Compared to Inky and Barr, the robbers moved with ridiculous slowness, as though they were fighting through the resistance of water. Almost half their number had been depleted already. Of those that remained four were the emaciated, palsied bank robbers, and three were normal men who acted as nurses and guards at the house. This last category included Frick. Spellin, as the brains behind the gang, didn't count for much in a struggle.

Inky and Barr swept into the packed group of thugs, flailing right and left with their clubs. The drug had given them a greatly superior swiftness and strength, a lightning-like reaction to the movements made by their opponents. Also it had given them an animal ferocity.

Most of the remaining men had guns, but they didn't dare use them. They clubbed the guns and made desperate, chopping motions, hoping to connect with Inky or Barr through sheer luck. The results were disastrous to them. Familiarity with the accelerator drug seemingly had bred contempt.

THE CURIOUSLY unequal fray was soon over. Inky broke the ring stand over the head of Frick, who had been swinging his shotgun like a baseball bat. Frick didn't have much of a head left when he hit the floor. Spellin attempted to escape, but Barr had been keeping a hungry eye on the crooked banker. Before Spellin got a dozen feet down the hall, Barr had caught him. He shook Spellin like a dog shakes a rat, only Spellin was shaken so fast that he blurred out of visibility. Finally, Barr hit the banker over the head with his fist and let the result sag limply to the floor.

When Inky and the Sheriff looked around for further prey, only a strewing of sprawled figures met their eyes. If any of the thugs remained, they had been fortunate enough to make good their escape. Inky decided not to bother about these. The leaders had been caught, and that was what counted most.

Now that the excitement was over, the two found themselves feeling weak and a little ill. They noticed that their hands had begun trembling. Obviously, the acceleration effects of the drug didn't last long.

"That's that," Inky sighed. He made a face. "Oooh! I feel rotten!"

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"Me too," said the Sheriff. "But it was worth it. What are we going to do with these crooks now, Inky?"

"Tie them up. Then I'm going to call the State Police."

Inky got several sheets from off the beds upstairs. He tore these into strips, then bound the prone forms in the hall securely. Some of them, however, needed no tying up. They were past causing any trouble.

Barr gazed down at Spellin with a hugely satisfied expression.

"You know," he said to Inky, "I'm kind of glad now that I got elected."

Inky grinned. He went in search of a telephone. But his mind was hardly on the task. Circulation figures of the Alderville Courier were kaleidoscoping brightly inside his head. They were going to be pretty darn big after the scoop was out.

And just wait until he told Trudy who that Fosman guy really was!

GOD OF THE PURE FIRE

★ By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT ★

THE HUICHOL Indians of Mexico have as a demi-god a certain kind of cactus which, when eaten, sends a person into a drugged state that puts them in high spirits. The plant doesn't grow in their country and every year they must make a long journey which takes over a month, to gather it. The wives at home look out for the safety of their men by walking very slowly and never running while their men are away. With the intention of securing rain for their crops they subject themselves to severe restrictions similar to those imposed on their husbands. During the whole time the men are on their journey until they return with a supply of cactus and hold the festival, no one washes except on special occasions, and then they use only water that has been brought from the distant land where the sacred cactus grows. There is much fasting and no eating of salt, and anyone breaking these rules is subject to illness and also jeopardizes the success of the journey. Good health, good fortune, and long life is to be expected from gathering the cactus which they call the gourd of the God of Fire.

Both men and women remain chaste for a certain period of time and must also purge themselves of past sins. So four days after the men have started on their journey into the distant land, the women come before Grandfather Fire and confess all the men they have been in love with since childhood. They must not omit a single possibility, for if they did, it would mean that the men would find no cactus. So in order not to forget any when they come before the fire god, they prepare a string of knots, each knot representing a lover. She brings this to the temple and as she stands before the fire, she reads aloud the names, and when she has finished, she throws the string of knots into the fire, and as the pure fire consumes the string, her sins are forgiven and leaves in peace. From the time of their confession till after the festival, the women are careful not to let any male pass near them. The men also have to confess all their affairs. They tie knots in a string, and after having told all to the "five winds", give the rosary of knots to the leader who burns it in the All Pure Fire.

THE INFINITE BRAIN

★ By H. R. STANTON ★

FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is determined, above all, to keep you informed of what is happening in that most esoteric and fascinating of all fields of physical science—the construction of automatic, mechanical, electrical brains. This is a subject which a few short years ago was strictly the property of the science-fictionist—now it has become the realm of the hard-bitten practicing unromantic scientist. It has changed from a dream to a possiblity, and shortly it will be more than that; it will become reality.

A short while ago we briefly reported on the development in England of a truly artificial brain—not a calculating machine—which was capable of simulating many of the functions of the human mind. In a recent issue of the English magazine, the *Electronic Engineer*, a long detailed article

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was written by the inventor of this unique gadget.

W. R. Ashby, an English scientist of repute has finally put together a conglomeration of switches, magnets, coils, and fluids which he calls a *homeostat*. This device is not capable of doing any particular thing of value—it is a research tool directing the way to more lavish creations. But it is a synthetic brain. When asked what characterizes living matter, one of the first things that comes to mind, is the ability of that living matter to adapt itself to its environment—to change as conditions about it change. No machine does this—except the homeostat!

This instrument is given outside disturbances and through feedback controls its own reactions to those disturbances! What an astounding thing, what a magnificent concept. The homoeostat is in reality simple-looking—but what it does is not simple, any more than a brain is simple.

Given time, Dr. Ashby declares that it is his intention to create a *thinking* brain, a machine actually capable of learning, partially demonstrated by the homeostat. This machine could initially play a game, learn it, play it well enough to beat most players and eventually become better than any player, because once taught the machine does not err. Chess will probably be the game it is taught.

But what is more remarkable than the machine itself, or for that matter, Dr. Ashby's intentions, is the fact that he specualtes upon the future and suggests that some time, not too remote, with the present centralization of government, the use of artificial brains will gradually come into being. Then it is possible that the brains may eventually dominate Man! The domination would be subtle but real. First the machine would learn to repair itself and then gradually take over the creation of its own parts. Whether it would do this malignantly is of course a moot point We can only speculate.

What is shocking is that this is not a science-fiction fan or writer talking. This is a scientist, a man who is in the process of working on these various monsters he describes. We may be sure that this is not simply fantasy but cold hard reality.

He concludes his article with the self-answered question. "how will it end?" by saying, "let us find out and see." And at the rate science is going that is just what we are going to do. There is no halting this evolutionary process; it is bound to come to a successful—or tragic—conclusion. The moving finger writes and having writ. . .

AGELESS ROBE

☆ By J. R. MARKS ☆

THE CHINESE have always been a race partial to quaint and charming superstitions. To ensure a long life, they are presented sometime during their life with grave clothes. These garments should be cut out and sewn by a young unmarried girl, for they feel that since this young person is likely to have a great many years of life ahead of her, a part of her ability to live must pass from her into the garment she sews. Among the clothes, there is one particularly beautiful robe upon which special pains have been taken to make it priceless. It is a long silken ice-blue garment with the word "longevity" embroidered on it all over in gold thread. For a daughter to make and present one of these lovely robes to a parent, is considered the ultimate act of appreciation and attention. As this garment was intended to prolong life, the owner wears it on all festive occasions and especially on birthdays when common sense tells him that he should lay in a great deal of vital energy, enough to last him through the coming year. So, wearing his gorgeous robes and absorbing in every pore its blessed influence, he receives his friends congratulations and their admirations for the garments and for the filial piety which prompted the children to bestow such a useful present on their father.

LIGHTNING ROD

☆ By L. A. BURT ☆

THE AMAZING reception with the numerous installations of TV sets calls for consideration of a hazard that is quite prominent. We refer to lightning.

It so happens that any pointed object such as a TV antenna thrust high up beyond the surrounding obstacles, constitutes a natural lightning rod, one which is capable of strongly attracting lightning strokes. This means that it must be made a true lightning rod—that is, it must have provision for discharging any electrical charges it accumulates. Fortunately this is a simple matter—but one which requires careful thought. The antenna must be equipped with a spark gap lightning arrester leading directly and by the shortest route to a well-grounded metal rod. Then any charge collected by the antenna must be across the spark gap and thence to ground where they will be dissipated instead of starting a possible fire. This is one reason why dealers recommend commercial installation, though anyone can put up lightning protection. It is just that the average home-installer *doesn't think* of it. So make a point of making sure that your house has lightning protection if there is an antenna reaching above the roof—or for that matter, an antenna protruding anywhere about the premises. It doesn't pay to play with lightning—Ben Franklin showed that.

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BACKWARD PASSAGE

By LEE FRANCIS

The alley was a challenge to Warner, for he knew that somewhere in the middle of it was a doorway — into the unknown . . .

THEATRE lights and the bright glow from the parking lot did not penetrate the alley. It was like the entrance to a cave lost between tall skyscrapers. During the day it spewed over the broken crates, half-filled garbage cans and roaring delivery trucks. At night, old women with talon-like, dirt-begrimed fingers wandered about, picking up choice bits of half-rotten food.

A man staggered out of the alley and turned, when he reached Randolph Street, to stare back into the darkness with terror-stricken eyes. His clothing was torn and ill-fitting. He was short and stubby, his head topped with curly black hair. He clutched a lamppost for support. Then his knees sagged beneath him and he fell forward, face down in the gutter.

There isn't anything unusual about a bum passing out on Randolph Street. But if that bum turns out to be Tony Sputozza, a gangster who was buried five years before in Greenlawn Cemetery, his reappearance is apt to cause unpleasant repercussions.

Very few people were aware of Tony Sputozza's reappearance. The doctor at receiving hospital recognized him. As soon as he made sure by examining the mole on Tony's right knee, Doc Hickory called Detective Grant Warner at headquarters. He was in a bad state when Warner finally answered the phone.

"Grant, for God's sake, where were you?"

Grant Warner wasn't easily excited. He had graduated from the first percinct and was making a nice place for himself in the plain clothes division. Warner didn't have to worry about being classed as a story-book detective. His red hair, snub nose and sad face took care of that. He did his work quietly and received a weekly stipend for his troubles. Beyond that, he was only Grant Warner, and the chief quite often coupled his name with the name of the Lord, whom he liked to speak of in vain.

"What's the matter, Hick?" Warner was proud of the nickname he'd tacked on Doc Hickory. "Are you drunk again?"

Doc Hickory's voice sank to a whisper.

"Drunk or crazy. Listen! I've got Tony Sputozza over here. I'm hiding him in the isolation ward until you get here."

Warner drew a toothpick from his vest pocket and started to pick his teeth calmly. He did it to retain a stubborn hold on sanity.

"Sputozza?" he said. "Well, well, it seems to me we buried him once. What was it, Hick, scotch or bourbon?"

Hickory's voice snapped angrily.

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He stood at the entrance to the alley, and as he looked, he saw a girl running toward him — and it seemed as if a shimmering light surrounded her . . .

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"Dammit, Grant, I'm not tipsy. I tell you Tony isn't dead, even if I did sign his death certificate. You get the hell over here before I..."

"All right, Doc," Warner said quickly. "Don't excite yourself. Lay down somewhere, anywhere. I'll pick up some stuff that will make you feel better."

"You do, and I'll....."

WARNER hung up before he found out what Hick was going to do. He started down-stairs, crumpling the toothpick as he walked, and climbed into the Chevvy in front of headquarters.

"Old Hickory," he said musingly and stepped on the starter. He wheeled the car expertly out of the small parking place and turned on the siren. "The old guy can drink a gallon of whiskey and cut off an arm with his eyes closed."

Lost in silent admiration for Hick, Warner missed three street cars and a garbage truck by close margins. With the feeling that people ought to show more respect for a police siren, he pushed the Chevvy up to fifty and followed the street car tracks down State Street.

Applying the brakes to prevent the Chevvy from piling into an ambulance, Grant Warner stepped under the awning at receiving hospital. He took the steps three at a time. He leaned over the doubtful display of beauty who held down the nigh desk.

"Hello beautiful. Doc Hickory is waiting for me. What cell are you keeping him in?"

The nurse wasn't interested, so Warner flashed his badge. The doubt was replaced by a blush of co-operation.

"Seventh floor. In his office. You're fresh, aren't you?"

"Correct," he said and hurried toward the elevator. "Fresh as a daisy."

The elevator stopped with a click and he stepped inside.

"Seven, and don't spare the horses."

Doc Hickory's office was a familiar hunting ground. Without hesitating, Warner pushed the door open. Old Hickory turned away from the window. His thin, gray face showed every sign that he might be suffering from a heart attack.

"Better sit down, Hick," Warner said. "The night air is bad."

"Shut up," Hick snarled. He was very unhappy.

The smile left Warner's homely face.

"Now, Hick, is that any way..."

"Shut up and sit down." Doc Hickory went to the desk and slumped into his chair. Warner's toothpick went to work once more.

"You aren't being serious about this?"

"You're damned right I am," Hick snorted. "I wanted to talk to you first, before we go upstairs. I'll be carrying you when we come down. *I tell you, Grant, it's Tony Sputozza and by the great God, I know what I'm talking about.*

Grant Warner knew Hick *thought* it was Tony. He knew that, contrary to his first impression, Old Hickory wasn't drunk. In fact, he had never seen a man more dead sober. It wasn't even healthy.

"So, Tony climbed through six feet of dirt out at Greenlawn and walked all the way to the Loop."

Hickory shuddered.

"Don't make a joke of it," he pleaded miserably. "Do you think it was the easiest thing in the world for me to face? I saw Tony buried. I saw them close the coffin and cover it with mud. For God's sake, Grant, am I losing my mind?"

Warner wasn't quite sure.

"All right," he said soberly. "Let's

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see your returned corpse."

Doc Hickory arose and went to the door. Warner followed him to the elevator and they shot upward. The upper hall that they entered was almost dark. The air was strong with the stench of chemicals.

The two men walked slowly to the last door on the right side of the hall. Hickory put his shoulder against the pine panel.

"You asked for it," he said. He pushed the door open and waited for Grant Warner to enter.

The detective dropped his cigarette on the hall floor. A funny feeling passed through him, like the sensation a man must get when he walks through the last door.

HE WENT in, and his face turned a bloodless white. His mouth opened as though he were about to say something, and remained open. The words never came.

Tony Sputozza arose from the bed and walked toward him. Tony Sputozza who had gone under a hail of tommy-gun fire five years ago. Tony, who Warner had seen placed in a steel casket and lowered into a rain washed grave.

"Hello, Warner," Tony held out a pudgy hand. His dark face was wreathed with a smile. "For a long time I ain't seen you around. How come? Don't Tony have friends any more?"

Warner accepted the handclasp automatically, a shudder passing through him.

"I'm afraid I don't get it," he admitted, "Where the hell did you come from?"

Sputozza looked surprised.

"Come from," he waved his arms excitedly. "Do I have to come from any place special? Ain't you even glad to see me?"

Warner grinned, but it wasn't an expression of amusement. This was Tony Sputozza all right. Tony who had kept Grant Warner supplied with Italian cigars and full of Ma Sputozza's spaghetti.

"No," he said slowly. "I'm glad to see you all right. I'd like to know where you've been hiding out, that's all."

Warner had been impressed from the first by the Italian's matter of fact acceptance of conditions as they were. It was as though Tony had left town for a week, and was just returning. Warner would have sworn that Sputozza knew nothing about his death. That to Tony, the city was the same and his friends were the same.

"I know what you're thinking," Tony's voice was sad and a little reproachful. "You're thinking Tony can't hold his wine any more. They say they found me in a gutter. That ain't no place for Tony, in no gutter. I'm sober now. I'm going right home to Mama and the kids."

Warner shot a warning look at Doc Hickory.

"I don't think you were drunk, Tony," he said easily.

Tony Sputozza grinned happily.

"Leave it to Grant," he told Hickory. "Grant's my pal. He don't think Tony's a bum."

"No," Warner said. "I been thinking. I got something I'd like to talk over with you. How about coming over to my apartment for a couple of hours. We'll have a drink and..."

Sputozza sprang from the bed.

"Sure—that's more like it."

Doc Hickory got his bulk wedged into the door.

"Wait a while," he said. "I'll have a car come around the back way and pick you up."

Sputozza looked puzzled, but Warner nodded.

"Maybe that's the best way," he

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said. "We'll take the freight elevator down when you call."

Tony Sputozza stared from one man to the other, a suspicious gleam in his eyes.

"Say," he said nervously. "What you two guys cooking up?"

"There's two or three bums looking for you Tony," Grant Warner said casually. "No sense taking chances."

He wondered how he was going to tell Tony Sputozza that his wife was dead and lying in a grave beside the one Tony should be occupying. How Tony had lost his place in society and about his daughters who were almost grown up and wouldn't be able to stand the shock of seeing their Papa again.

GRANT WARNER faced a tough problem and preferred to face it alone. Somehow he felt responsible for Sputozza. The little gangster had always had a soft spot in his heart for Warner during Warner's early days on the force. Sputozza had tipped him off to a number of things that made promotions possible.

Tony was asleep, overcome by too much good whiskey and some knock-out drops that Warner had slipped into his last drink. Warner hated to do it, but there wasn't any choice. He had to have time to think things over.

When Tony finally started to snore loudly, Warner left him stretched comfortably across the davenport, donned his hat and went out to the car. Driving would clear his mind and help him make a decision. If any of Tony's old gang spotted the Italian, it wouldn't be hard to guess what the reaction might be.

Warner drove down to the Loop and as though by a prearranged plan, found himself parking close to the alley where Tony was first seen. He left the car and wandered across the street. It was a little after ten, and a steady stream of pedestrians wandered by, seeking the bright lights near by. Warner stood near the entrance to the alley for some time, scowling fiercely into the darkness as though he expected to find some solution in the shadows.

He thought he saw something move about a half block away. Otherwise the alley was deserted. Straining his eyes to catch another glimpse of the moving object, he saw that it was a girl. She wandered toward him, staggering slightly.

"Had a couple too many," Warner said in a low voice, then was immediately sorry for the remark he had made. The girl was close enough now so the street lamp behind him lighted her face. He knew at once that she wasn't the drinking type. That she didn't belong here. Her eyes met his and they were soft and frightened. Her slim figure, partly hidden under a soiled trench coat, was lithe and youthful. She started to run, her lips parted, arms outstretched toward Warner.

"Please," her voice would have been thrilling if it weren't so filled with terror. *"Help me."*

She tripped and fell into his arms. Warner tried to stand her on her feet, but her face, when it turned up to the light, was pale and bloodless. She had fainted.

He picked her up in his arms and pushed through the gathering crowd. People made him blindly angry at a time like this. They pressed in around him, fighting to see what had happened.

"Get the hell out of the way," he said tersely and jabbed his elbow in a fat woman's ribs. She jumped away with an angry cry and Warner kicked open the door to a small resturant.

A waiter hurried forward and helped Warner get the girl into a chair. Her head sagged forward.

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"Get some water for her," Warner said, and headed for the phone booth.

In two minutes he had Hickory on the wire. The Doctor had been worried about Warner since he left the hospital with Tony.

"What's the good word, Grant?" he asked.

"Get an ambulance down here where they found Tony," Warner said tersely. "There's another one."

"Another one?" Distinct alarm echoed in Hickory's voice.

"I can't be sure," Warner continued. "But if my memory is any good, this girl drowned herself in the Chicago river four years ago. Her name is Randy White. Now, will you start moving?"

"Right away." Hickory said quietly. "But for God's sake, Grant, what's it all about?"

Warner groaned.

"I wish I knew," he admitted.

DOCTOR Howard Phelps was the third and last person to come out of the alley. The Doctor returned as had Tony Sputozza. Grant Warner interviewed him at the hospital, and at that time Phelps was positive that he had suffered from a temporary touch of amnesia. He planned to continue with his practice at once.

* * *

It was late at night. Warner asked Randy White to remain with Tony at Warner's apartment. The girl had been in the hospital for a day. She appreciated Warner's friendship because, as she expressed it:

"I haven't a place in the world to go."

Now, with a badly puzzled and slightly irate Dr. Phelps, Warner drove to the apartment and prepared to make a clean breast of the whole thing.

In ten minutes, he had introduced his three visitors and was very busy serving cocktails. Phelps, clean cut and a professional appearing man of about fifty, was impatient to be on his way.

"I like you, Warner," he said simply. "It was nice of you to take an interest in me, but my wife will be holding supper. I have a number of cases to look in on this evening."

Warner had been holding his secret as long as he dared. He looked at the doctor calmly.

"Are you capable of taking a severe shock, Doctor?"

Phelps looked puzzled.

"I don't understand?"

"Well, let's get it over with." Warner sat down, staring from one face to the other. "I don't think that you people actually know why you're here. I don't think you know that each of you was picked up more dead than alive at the entrance to the same downtown alley.

"Wait a minute," Phelps protested. "You make this sound like a mystery. I was overcome by hard work. My heart isn't good."

Warner smiled.

"It certainly isn't, Doctor. According to the records, it stopped beating five years ago."

Doctor Phelps' face turned white.

"Please," he begged, let's not joke..."

Warner leaned forward and placed his glass on the table.

"This is no joke," he said. "Listen to me, and don't interrupt. Each of you was picked up in bad condition and rushed to the hospital. Doctor Hickory will vouch for that. Now, here is the reason you are here. If I let you wander about as you wish, returning to your old haunts, you'll cause a sensation that will rock the whole nation."

"But why?"

He looked at Randy White's small, oval face. She had turned very pale.

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Her hands were clenched. He hated most of all to hurt Randy. She looked as though she had been hurt enough. There wasn't any choice.

"Because I have newspaper records here which I borrowed from the files. Also police records.

"Briefly, Tony Sputozza who sits here with a very lively grin on his face is shown as having died five years ago and was buried at Greenlawn Cemetery."

HE HEARD Tony gasp, and Randy White's glass slipped from her fingers and crashed on the rug.

"Mrs. Sputozza followed her husband to his grave a month later and his daughters are both married."

He heard a choked sob escape Tony's lips. The Italian started to rise, then sank back into his chair. The room was deathly still.

Warner didn't dare look up.

"Randy White," he said, and the girl's breath sucked in quickly. "Daughter of an upstate farmer. Randy tried to find work here in the city, drowned herself in the Hudson River and her body was shipped home. All this happened four and a half years ago."

Deathly stillness. Doctor Phelps shifted nervously in his chair. Randy's eyes were wet.

"Doctor Phelps, former surgeon and physician, died of cancer July eighth, nineteen thirty-eight. Both wife and daughter living. Wife remarried. Phelps was buried at High Point Cemetery."

Warner looked up.

The clock ticked loudly. Tony reached for a handkerchief and mopped his eyes. Randy White was biting her lip, and the skin broke open. Blood ran against her teeth. Doctor Phelps stared at the carpet, his fists closing and opening slowly.

"I think you understand now why you are here?"

Randy White staggered to her feet, and moved toward him mechanically. She took three steps and fainted, falling into his arms. Warner lifted her into his arms and placed her on the davenport. Tony Sputozza stood up and stared at the girl.

"Kinda funny feeling, being dead—and *not* dead, huh sport?"

There was no humor in his expression.

"But how? It defies all the laws. It—it couldn't happen," Phelps protested weakly. "It isn't fair. My wife is married to another man. My old life gone. I can't face that."

Warner turned and his eyes were stern.

"That's why I brought you all here," he said. "I've taken the responsibility for this poblem. You all understand as much as I do. I know this much. None of you must ever go back to the place you were before you died. Somehow it will work out. But, under no circumstances must you see or be seen by anyone you knew before."

Tony Sputozza chuckled. He seemed to take it slightly better than the rest of them.

"That's okay with me, Sport. Just give me orders and I'll do the rest."

Randy White had opened her eyes. She stared up at Warner with a wan smile.

"I won't be foolish again," she promised. "It—it isn't everyday a person comes back to life."

Warner felt a strange choking sensation in his throat. Randy, more than the rest of them needed his help.

"You won't suffer," he promised. "Not as long as I can help you."

Her fingers closed tightly around his hand. Her eyes were dry again. "Thanks," she whispered.

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IT WAS all a matter of readjustment, Grant Warner tried to tell himself. He had become the self-appointed guardian of these unfortunate people. Several weeks had passed and thus far everything was going nicely.

Warner leaned back comfortably before the fireplace and studied the wall with dreamy half-closed eyes.

Phelps was back in practice Warner had financed him and Phelps had changed his name to Walter Bascomb.

Tony hadn't changed his name, nor had Randy. Randy had never been known in the city and Tony was staying away from his old haunts. Tony grew a mustache and dressed in quiet clothes. He didn't look like the gangster of old. Randy was working in the basement of a downtown department store. Tony drove a laundry truck over on the west side. Phelps, or Walter Bascomb was doing fairly well and had already built up a small practice.

The hall door blew open, and swearing at the faulty catch, Warner arose and closed it. He sat down again, but was aware somehow that the room was not the same. He looked about him at the familiar paper, the odds and ends he had collected. There was another chair opposite his own. The chair had been moved to face the fire as was his own.

Warner sat very still, puffing on his cigarette. He remembered distinctly that the chair had been moved since he stood up to close the door. He hadn't touched it.

"I suppose there *is* an eerie feeling when one can sense and yet not see a visitor," a voice said from the other chair.

Warner's fingers stiffened about the arms of his chair. He didn't move.

"However, don't be frightened. Perhaps fortunately for you, you don't have to worry about looking at me. I'm here with a message. I won't remain long."

Warner didn't trust himself to speak. There was something, at least a voice coming to him from that other chair. He placed both feet together on the floor. He removed the cigarette from his mouth and pinched out the sparks between his fingers.

"I don't understand?"

"Don't try, friend." The voice was firm and yet gentle. "You have taken it upon yourself to act as guardian to a certain group of rather odd people."

IT DAWNED on Warner that here was a solution for the return of Tony and the others. An answer to a question that had been driving him slowly mad. "Don't feel that you are to blame," the voice continued. Actually it is I who am at fault."

"But—who are you?" Warner added. "Where did you and the others come from?"

A dry chuckle followed.

"Where do most of us go according to the fire and brimstone league, when we die?"

Warner didn't answer.

"There was a crack in the wall," the voice said. "I should have had it attended to at once. Instead, I left it for a few nights. When we took roll call yesterday, three were gone. They had wandered through the wall and back here to life."

"Look here," Warner protested. "I guess I understand what you're trying to get across. But, take the girl for example. Do you have to take *her* back. Doesn't she deserve the second chance she's getting?"

This time the voice chuckled gleefully.

"I was beginning to fall for that babe myself," it admitted. "Sorry, Bud, but you can't fiddle around with *this* business. I got thirty lashes of the forked-whip for not getting the

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wall patched. It brought up complications that I don't like to face."

"Yes, I'm listening."

"Well," the voice said, "first, thanks for taking charge here. It consolidated my problem and I owe that much to you. Secondly, I can't take any of them back with me. They have another chance until they commit another crime that demands their return. They can remain here. I'm sure that within three months they will all be ready for the trip back. The girl is weak. She'll try to escape life again. The other two, well, we'll see."

"We'll see," Warner agreed weakly.

"Another thing," the voice said sharply. "You'll keep an eye on them. You're more or less a partner of mine from now on. You will report to me at the end of three months. I will base my findings on your report."

"Thanks," Warner said stiffly. He was in direct partnership with evil forces that were beyond his power to fight.

"I'll be going," the voice said. "But remember, I'll be back in three months."

Warner didn't move. The door opened.

"Look out for one of them," the voice warned. "There is one in the group that is more horrible than the rest. This person will turn on you and destroy you if the opportunity presents itself."

The door closed and Warner felt the skin on his neck prickle strangely. He hadn't thought of that. He knew their secret. With him out of the way, all of them could escape their memories.

He continued to puff on the cigarette, but the smoke was flat and tasteless. He tossed the stub into the fire and hurried out of the room. Outside on the street, the air was clear and cold. The wind felt good.

Which of the three couldn't he trust his own life with?

RANDY WHITE had been acting strangely for a week. Warner noticed it for the first time when he took the evening off and attended a local theatre with her. Randy had changed. Her cheeks were red once.

Randy had been starved for pleasure and she enjoyed every moment with Warner. It was after the theatre, while they sat across from each other in a tiny restaurant that Randy's face clouded and she stared questioningly at Warner as though hating to spoil his evening.

"Grant," she said after a time. "I'm afraid I'm not very grateful for all you've done."

Warner's smile faded slightly.

"I don't expect to have you exclusively for myself, just because we—we sort of started together."

She smiled and shook her head.

"Wrong guess," she said. "You're going to have me chasing you around as long as I can find you. It's something else, Grant. I'd like to quit my job."

Warner's face clouded.

"I don't think I understand. Is the work too difficult?"

She shook her head, and a frown creased her forehead.

"It's—something else. Grant. I'd rather not speak of it right now. Do you suppose you could find something for me? I'd look for a position myself, but I know you are trying to keep me hidden. That isn't a very nice word for it."

Warner wondered if the girl was unhappy. If the old weakness was coming back. Would it always be like this? Would Randy always be afraid to fight back when the going got tough.

"I'll see what can be done," he said at last. "Any particular work you'd like to try your hand at?"

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"No, only I'll have to get out of that basement. Perhaps another place in the same store?"

He nodded.

"I know the manager. I'll see what I can do."

They continued eating silently for a few minutes. Randy studied him with quiet, worried eyes.

"Grant, you aren't angry?"

"No—why should I be?"

Her shoulders moved slightly.

"Oh, you got me the job. Now after a few weeks I want another. Grant," she leaned forward and her fingers tightened around his. "I *do* have a good reason."

"I know," Warner said. "Don't think any more of it."

ON MONDAY morning Randy White was transferred to the tenth floor. Warner forgot about the incident. Forgot until a week later when he waited to take Randy to lunch. She was talking quietly to a slim, sandy-haired man who came down with her on the elevator. Warner was sure that Randy hadn't expected him. She stopped short when she saw him waiting and argued in a low, passionate voice with the man at her side. He turned, caught Warner's eyes and smiled wryly.

Randy came on alone, greeting him with a flustered:

"Hello Grant. I didn't expect you so soon."

Perhaps he was a fool. Perhaps there was more boy in him than man. At that moment he was so terribly hurt that he couldn't trust himself to speak.

She took his arm.

"Grant, please, what's the matter?"

He drew away from her.

"Forget it," he said gruffly. "I guess I've been getting the wrong impression. You didn't have to send him away because I was here. You don't owe me a thing."

He left her alone and made his way blindly to the street. He wasn't good for anything the remainder of the day. Her face had been pale and frightened as she stared at him.

He wanted Randy White to know that he didn't need gratitude. That she didn't owe him anything. Her life was her own and he intended to leave her alone from now on.

The afternoon was a long one. He wandered around town for several hours and at last returned to the apartment. The phone was ringing as he came upstairs. At first he planned not to answer. Then, when it didn't stop, he lifted the receiver.

"Grant, for the love of Mike, where have you been?"

It was Doc Hickory's voice.

"Working," Warner said. "Don't tell me...."

"No," Hickory sounded strangely worked up. "Grant, what did you do to that poor girl?"

Randy? How did Hickory know?

"Doc, for God's sake, what is it?"

He was filled suddenly with terrible remorse.

"You'd better get over here to the hospital, Grant," Hickory's voice was like cold steel. "The girl is hysterical. She killed a man this afternoon."

Randy a murderess?

Warner knew that he answered somehow and hung up. His feet carried him downstairs, but all the time his mind was back in his own room, before the fireplace. All over again he was hearing the words he had heard from the voice.

"The girl is weak. She'll try to escape life again..."

Randy had killed a man and somehow he, Grant Warner, was to blame.

RANDY WAS sitting up in bed when he arrived. Her head was bandaged and the eyes that stared at

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him from beneath the strip of gauze were bitter. He crossed the room, nodding to the police woman and sat down at Randy's side.

"Randy, darling, why did you do it?"

She turned away.

"Grant, you didn't have to come here. This is my own problem. You aren't involved."

There was something in her voice that begged him to stay. To help her when she needed him most.

"Randy," he repeated her name again, trying to think of the right thing to say. "Who was it?"

She shrugged.

"The police will tell you," she said. "I—hurt my head. As soon as I'm stronger they'll take me to jail. You'll come to see me, at least until..."

Warner knew nothing of the case. He hadn't taken time to find out.

"I don't give a damn what happened," he said in a low voice. "Randy, you're good. You wouldn't harm a fly unless you had a good reason."

Her lips parted slightly, her eyes softened.

"You can't help me, Grant," she said. "Leave me alone. I'll get along."

"I'll be damned if I will, Randy. I was wildly jealous today. I made a fool of myself. Randy, I love you. A man in love does some crazy things."

One moment she was sitting sternly erect, her whole body shaking with emotion. The next she sank against him, her arms about his neck, lips seeking his.

"Oh Grant, I wish I could tell—I wish..."

It didn't matter at that moment if she was a murderess or not. He knew he would save her from the law.

He wondered if he could save her from the hall of judgment represented by the voice.

"SHE TOLD me that she asked you to get her another job to escape this man, James," Hickory said. "James was a floor manager in the basement. When Randy went to the tenth floor, James came up to heckle her. She told me that this noon you saw her with James and grew angry. It wasn't her fault. The man followed her down on the elevator."

Warner stood up and started to pace from one end of the office to the other.

"Go on," he said.

Hickory cleared his throat.

"This afternoon, about three, they brought her in with a flesh wound on her forehead and a set of nerves that were ready to snap. This guy James cornered her in the stock room and got fresh. She warned him to stay away but I guess the place was locked and he had the key. He went out of bounds. Randy hit him over the head with the arm off a window dummy. Clear case of self-defense. She'll get away without trouble."

Warner knew this should make him feel better, but somehow it didn't. He stared moodily at Hickory.

"But will she have to go back to the horror she escaped from?" he asked. "You know as well as I do that they're waiting for an excuse."

Hickory shook his head.

"I like Randy a lot," he said. "But, Grant, that's a problem that's beyond both of us. It's left to a power greater than yours or mine."

Tony Sputozza came in quickly and closed the door behind him. He stood with his back tightly against it, staring across Warner's apartment. His hair was mussed and his eyes were flashing.

"Good evening, Mr. Warner." He was out of breath. "I—thought I'd come up and see my old friend for a little while."

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Grant Warner dropped the book he had been studying and looked up.

"You sure came in like a whirlwind. Why didn't you ring."

Sputozza left the door.

"I thought you were up," he said. "The door was ajar. I saw the light."

He circled the room and sat down on the edge of the chair opposite Warner. His coat pocket was bulging heavily. There was a streak of mud on his sleeve. His eyes travelled from the door to Warner and back to the door again. Warner chuckled.

"Look here, Tony, what's the mystery? Something's wrong. Are you in trouble?"

Tony looked angry.

"No trouble. No trouble at all. Can't a guy pay you a visit?"

Warner stood up. He went to the door and opened it. The hall was deserted. He closed the door and locked it. Then he went to the window and stared down the fire escape. It was deserted. He pulled the shade down. He went back and sat down again. Tony had caught his breath and was looking more at ease.

"How you getting along, Mr. Warner?" Tony asked.

"Fine," Warner said. "You heard that Randy got in trouble?"

Tony nodded.

"I'd like to have got a crack at that guy before she did," he said. "That Randy, she's one fine girl."

"By the way Tony," Warner said. "I see you're packing a rod again."

TONY'S face turned brick red. His hand travelled swiftly to his pocket then retreated slowly.

"You got sharp eyes," he said. "Yes! I got a rod."

Warner's expression wasn't pleasant.

"Why?" he snapped.

Tony wriggled uncomfortably.

"It's a habit," he said nervously. "I don't feel dressed without a rod."

Warner continued to stare at him.

"Tony," he said. "You promised not to make me any more trouble. What have you been up to?"

Tony's face was beaded with perspiration.

"It ain't your business, Mr. Warner," he said. "You hadn't oughta..."

"I'll make it my business," Warner said. "Now—out with it."

"It ain't nothin...."

Tony froze suddenly, cutting off in mid-sentence. The room was deathly silent. The curtain stirred slightly. The window had been closed. There could be no breeze.

Warner sank deeper into the overstuffed chair. His eyes were on Sputozza. Tony's gaze never left the curtain. The window was being raised slowly behind it. Sputozza was on his feet, moving stealthily toward the door. His fingers reached the light switch and the bulb snapped off. As it did, Warner left his chair like a shadow and moved toward the window. The curtain slipped up and for a brief instant the figure of a man was silhouetted in the moonlight. Then the safety on Tony's automatic clicked and the barrel spewed fire.

Warner reached the light and snapped it on. He grabbed Tony's gun and pushed it into his own pocket. Down the hall half a dozen people were shouting excitedly.

Now that he had killed, Tony seemed to lose his spirit. He turned to Warner with a wild, frightened look in his eyes.

"Grant, I had to shoot him. It's Spike Walker, my old partner. He's a bum, Grant. He was going to tell my daughters, and my old gang, that I was in circulation. I had to kill him to keep him from telling, Grant. He wanted money. More money than I can get peddling laundry."

Spike wouldn't be blackmailing

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anyone anymore.

"Shut up," Warner said. "You didn't kill him. I shot him. He came here after me. I'm the law, understand?"

"Grant, you'll get in trouble." Tony sank down on the davenport and started to sob. "You're a good friend. I can't...."

Grant shook him. He lifted the little man by the coat lapels and stood him on his feet.

"No one's in trouble," he said fiercely. "I can shoot a crook in self-defense. Get hold of yourself."

People were crowding around the hall door. Someone was knocking loudly. Tony was quiet now.

"Out the back door," Warner said. "Go straight home and keep your mouth shut. No one will know."

He watched Tony go out through the kitchen. Then, with a last look at the man on the floor, he turned to the phone and dialed headquarters.

THE MORNING of Randy White's trial arrived. The killing of Spike Walker had been accepted as routine. Warner remembered that Spike had threatened to 'get him' and supposed that this was the attempt. Fortunately, Warner said, although his own gun was in the closet, he had purchased an old one and was fooling around with it when Spike tried to break in.

Now, with a supremely grateful Tony Sputozza sitting at his side, Warner was on his way to court.

Although Randy's trial promised to be a matter of routine, Warner knew he must be near the girl in case any unexpected excitement occurred. It was half-past-ten. The trial opened at ten-thirty-five. Warner leaned forward and spoke to the cab driver.

"Push it a little faster. I'll see that you get an extra buck."

The driver glanced down at the speedometer and stepped on the gas. They were all accustomed to fast driving. It hadn't occurred to Warner that what might be a safe speed in his own car was suicide in a cab. They reached a crowded downtown section, and the driver, his mind on money, didn't slacken speed. A street car, slower than usual, tried to beat the light. The cab slipped half way into the intersection, the brakes screamed and Warner suddenly saw the street, the sky and the sidewalk spinning wildly in front of him. He was dully aware of pain. Then something struck him full in the face and he went out like a light.

* * *

Tony Sputozza turned over painfully. He groaned and sat up. A crowd had gathered around him. He couldn't see Grant or the driver of the cab. Someone took his arm, but he shook himself free.

"Thanks," he said thickly. "I'm okay."

He stood up. He was stiff and sore in every muscle. He pushed his way through the group of people to find Grant Warner stretched out full length on the pavement. Warner's face was white. His arm was twisted behind him and blood clotted his coat at the shoulder. His body had a queer, twisted appearance.

Voices were rising on all sides. Tony saw a cop push his way through the crowd.

"What's going on here?"

Tony remembered how swell Grant had been, and knew he must pay the detective back some way. He faced the cop.

"My friend is badly hurt," he said. "We got to get a doctor."

The cop took a quick look at Warner.

"I'll phone right away," he said.

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"Ambulance will be here in ten minutes." Tony stood still, forlorn and bloody, wondering if ten minutes was too long. Maybe Grant would die in ten minutes. Then he thought of Doctor Phelps. Doctor Phelps would know what to do. He turned, trying to spot a cab. One was wedged in, blocked by the wreck.

"Hey you," he called. "You in the cab. Give me a hand."

The driver climbed out reluctantly.

"I ain't touching no one," the driver said. "There's a law."

Tony swore. He went down on one knee and picked Warner up.

"You don't have to touch him. Get in that damn cab and *drive*."

WARNER lay very still, his head on Tony's lap. The cab stopped before a small bungalow. There was a small sign attached to a picket fence.

"Doctor Bascomb, Physician and Surgeon."

"You hurry up and ring the bell," Tony shouted to the driver. He lifted Warner out of the cab with great difficulty. Somehow Tony felt better already. He had brought Warner to the Doc, and saved a lot of time.

He saw Doctor Bascomb—Alias Phelps open the door. The doctor waited as Tony carried Warner past him. Then he hurried ahead and opened the door to a small operating room. Tony waited until Warner was lying safely on a high white-top table. Then he paid the cab driver and turned to Phelps. Phelps was already at work over Warner, cutting away the coat near the shoulder and loosening his collar.

"You do a good job, Doc," Tony said. "We owe him a lot, us three."

Phelps nodded.

"What happened?"

His fingers moved swiftly, surely, over the bloody wounds.

"Car cracked up," Tony said. "*You do a good job, Doc.*"

His voice was cold.

Phelps turned and smiled.

"Don't worry, Sputozza," he said. "I agree with you. We all owe him something."

There was a warmth of understanding between them suddenly and Tony relaxed. He took off his coat and started to wash away the blood and dirt on his arms. He examined the small cuts on his hands and arms, shrugged his shoulders and returned to the table. Warner was almost undressed now. His arm was broken at the shoulder and twisted out of shape. His leg was gashed above the knee. Flesh wounds covered his face.

"Is it bad, Doc?"

Phelps nodded and spoke in a quiet voice.

"Pretty bad," he said. "I'll have to operate."

Tony stiffened. He didn't know much about cutting, but he *did* know it killed a lot of people.

"The arm?" he asked.

Phelps was still examining, cleaning.

"The arm and the chest. Internal bleeding."

Tony felt sick to his stomach.

"That's bad, huh Doc?"

"Very bad." The doctor started to wheel a large tray of instruments to the table.

Tony sat down. He felt very sick. He watched the Doc put Grant to sleep and waited until the knife was ready to descend on the arm. Then he escaped for fresh air.

He thought he heard a police siren at a distance. He listened, then decided he must be wrong. Returning to the hall, he opened the door to the operating room quietly, so he

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wouldn't disturb the doctor.

He stopped short, his eyes narrowing with terror.

Phelps stood over Warner's body, a slim, glistening knife raised over the unconscious man's chest.

Tony stared about wildly for some weapon. At his elbow was a small table covered with magazines. The doctor was standing very still, the knife gripped in his palm. It was like a sacrificial altar. The blade seemed to ripple under the bright light. Tony's hand crept out, contacted the heavy binding on a large book.

At the same time he uttered a wild yell and sprang forward. The book caught the knife, sending it flying across the room into the corner. Phelps jerked around, shocked surprise in his eyes. Tony's fist connected just once. The Doctor's jaw crumpled and he slipped toward the floor. A groan escaped his bloody lips.

Clear and loud now, the siren sounded a block away and died down as the ambulance stopped outside.

GRANT Warner sat up painfully and tried to arrange the pillows more comfortably behind his back. The hospital room was white and very peaceful. The sun crept under the lowered shade and made him drowsy. He stared up at the blank ceiling, then at the empty visitor's chair near the bed.

"Randy—safe," he said aloud. "I wonder how long?"

"For keeps, I'd say."

He stiffened. This time no one had to tell him who was in the room. The voice came from the empty chair.

"Has—it been three months?" he asked weakly.

"Three months," the voice said. "But don't worry. You're still pretty weak from that bad arm. I don't want *you* to pass out."

Warner was silent, wondering what he could say.

"Let's make the report a short one," the voice said. "I've been around some myself. Have a pretty good idea what's happened."

"Don't take the girl," Warner begged. "She's not bad. She couldn't help it."

The voice chuckled.

"Let me be the judge of that," he said. "You state your case."

"Randy killed a man," Warner said, and the voice whistled.

"Not exactly child's play," it said.

"But in self-defense," Warner pleaded.

"Go on."

"Tony Sputozza killed a gangster," Warner went on. "It wasn't badness that made him do it. He was protecting his family."

"Go on."

"That's all," Warner wondered when the voice would leave. "The doctor has been fine. He even forgave Tony for knocking him out."

He would have to explain Tony's actions in more detail.

"It was like this. Phelps was ready to operate on me, and Tony thought he was murdering me. Tony doesn't trust a knife. The Doc was fine. At least *he* has a clear record."

The voice chuckled.

"Phelps *was* an odd case," he admitted. "We never understood why they sent him to us to begin with. He died of cancer. He'd never done anything wrong that we could find on the records."

"Wait," Warner begged. "First, the girl. You've got to tell me what is to happen to her."

The voice laughed.

"Remember I said I could go for her myself?" it asked. "Well, I don't blame you for worrying about her.

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She's all right, though. She stays here. It's no crime to kill in self defense."

Warner tried to mutter his thanks. Randy was safe. Randy, clear eyed and lovely, safe to become his wife.

"About Sputozza," the voice went on. "He's a bad egg in some ways, but he seems to have changed. He went out of his way to help you. I guess you might say he killed in self-defense also. Let's forget him. I'll write him off the books and give him his chance."

Warner sighed. They were all safe. All three of them.

"The Doctor though," the voice said doubtfully. "I ain't so sure of him."

"But why not?" Warner protested.

"The Doc's a queer one," the voice continued. "We finally got his record straightened out. He a sadist. Likes to cut people up when it isn't necessary."

A VAGUE feeling of horror was creeping through Warner. "Surely he hasn't done such a thing. I've watched him closely."

The voice chuckled grimly.

"You can't watch anyone when you're under ether, Bud. The Doc didn't have to cut you open. Sputozza guessed right. The Doc hated your guts. I *warned* you to be careful. The Doc is the only really bad one in the lot. If it wasn't for Tony, you'd be a dead buzzard right now."

"I want you to look at these x-rays," Hickory said. "Darndest thing I ever heard of. Phelps was ready to operate on your chest. These prints show that there is no injury."

He stood by the edge of the bed, shaking with anger. Warner smiled and waved the prints away.

"I know," he said.

Hickory seemed about to explode.

"You *know?* How the hell could you? If Phelps had cut, you'd be dead now. How can you act so calm about the whole thing? So help me I'm going to have him thrown out of the profession."

Warner grinned.

"He's out already," he said.

Hickory's face became grim. He leaned over the bed and spoke through clenched teeth.

"Listen here, son. Sometimes you madden me to the point of violence. You know everything. I said I was going to give Phelps a piece of my mind and I'll do it if I have to follow him to hell to catch him."

Randy White, sitting on the other side of the bed, squeezed Warner's hand tightly in hers and leaned forward to kiss his forehead. She looked up at Doc Hickory.

"You'll have to hurry," she said gently. "It's a long way to go, and Phelps has a head start."

From his chair near the foot of the bed, Tony Sputozza chuckled. Even Warner managed to smile.

Hickory stared at them, an incredulous grin breaking over his crusty face.

"You don't mean....?"

They all nodded.

Hickory cracked his palms together sharply.

"I've never been happier about anything in my life," he said sincerely.

"Now if you and Tony can get together and knocked the tar out of this husband of yours, perhaps I'll have a little peace myself."

"She's not my wife yet," Warner said.

Randy kissed him again.

"But I will be in ten minutes," she said. "The Justice of Peace has promised to come to the hospital. He's on his way up now."

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INCOMPATIBLE

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By ROG PHILLIPS

Zadha Omo landed on the Earth, a great hunger gnawing at her — but then she saw the animals, and she knew she would eat again . . .

ZADHA OMO shut off the cutting torch and stood back while the smoking hot rectangular section of the shell plate fell inward, bounced off a bulkhead, and came to rest on a pile of debris in one corner of the crazily tilted compartment. It had landed on the carcass of one of the Zoiltos.

The stench of searing skin rose from the creature in steaming vapors, causing Zadha to wrinkle her nose in disgust. It was necessary, however, to wait until the hot edge of the opening cooled, before she could climb out of the wrecked ship; so she stood there, enduring the odor.

The Zoiltos, the hairless cattle upon which she had fed during her voyage of exploration, were dead. Dead, they

The creature stood at the entrance to the cellar, and the people inside it stared in horrified terror at the monstrous face . . .

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were of no further use to her as food sources.

Leaning weakly against the bulkhead and closing her eyes, she "explored." There were many thought-foci within a radius of a mile or so. None of these were intelligent, and none of them seemed to be aware of the crash of the ship. But wait—some of them were aware, but seemed uncurious.

That puzzled her. They were neither afraid nor curious. Why? She searched back to a thought focus that had been easier to read than the others, that had been aware of the crash.

The answer came, finally. There were so many crashes. They were of ships, too; but a different kind of ship—one that apparently was designed for travel only in the atmosphere. They were occupied by some type of creature known to the thought focus as Fighter Pilots. And the creature owning the thought focus classed itself as a Geeyiy. It was of a different breed, evidently; or at least it seemed to be.

Or did it? There had been a flash of thought—a mere spark—subliminal—that the creature had a brother who was a Fighter Pilot. Incomprehensible!

Zadha Omo opened her eyes, a puzzled frown on her high, intelligent forehead. Feeling the edge of the opening she had cut, she found it cool. With one last, regretful look around at the ruins of what had been her only possibility of returning to her home planet, she climbed out and dropped to the ground.

There was darkness outside, for which she was glad. The radiations from the Sun of this planet were extremely painful in their concentrations. That Sun had sunk below the horizon less than an hour before, and she knew she would have eight full hours to find a hiding place to protect her from those rays before it rose on the opposite horizon.

Cautiously, she made her way across the unfamiliar terrain, strange odors filling the damp air and bringing hints of mold and decay coupled with odors of life. An errant tendril of atmosphere brought the heady odor of food—and was gone. It made Zadha relax, though. Since food existed, she would not die.

There was the glow of a life-aura ahead. It rose from a still, crumpled form. Zadha touched it briefly with her mind, but received no response. The creature was unconscious.

With a faint moan of relief she sunk to her knees beside it. Later she arose, her hunger and thirst sated.

SHE CONTINUED on, now, skirting places where life auras glowed faintly. The Geeyiy creatures were numerous, but they were of a distinctly low order of intelligence, and totally blind to all energies except a narrow band of radiation in the color band. Her own aura glowed brightly now. Yet in her wary exploration of the thought foci about her she detected not one that was aware of her stealthy progress.

Two hours later she decided she was far enough away from the ship to safely destroy it. First, though, she must find a place to hide from the radiations of the destruction.

Ahead was a cluster of towering vegetation—thick trunks topped by profuse branches clustered with flat, green leaves. From this cluster of vegetation a feeble glow of light flickered.

Softly she crept up to the source of illumination. It was some sort of dwelling place, built from machined fiber of the vegetation covered with a protective film containing mostly an oxide of lead—from its radiation.

The light came from a torn slit in

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a covering inside a window. Luck was with her. She was able to get an adequate view of the interior. And sounds came to her through the walls.

For another precious hour she remained motionless, studying the creatures inside, reading their thoughts and relating them to the sounds by which they exchanged their thoughts, whispering them over to herself until she felt sure she could use them fluently.

The creatures were even lower than the Zoiltos, and seemed lower than the Geeyiys, but she read in their thoughts that they were non-hostile, and would be glad to welcome her if she covered herself with some wrapping they were conditioned to accept.

Sighing at the necessary delay, she sped silently back to the creature that had provided her with food. It was dead, now, so she wasted little time. Soon she was speeding back to the dwelling place. The wrappings rested on her skin with clammy touch, choking the skin cells with its odors and radiations.

She would gladly have avoided having to wear it, but she knew that there was no place she could hide safely when daylight returned—unless she made friends of these creatures; so, wear it she must.

Shortly she was at the window again. Inside nothing had changed materially. She watched and listened and probed until she was satisfied. Then she crept around to the doorway and, after studying the latching mechanism with her fingers until she had solved it, twisted the knob and pushed in on the door.

As the door opened the light blinded her. She had somewhat expected this and switched over to awareness through the thought foci of the creatures for her awareness of things external.

They accepted her. They accepted her at once, and classified her as Waac creature, which, she discovered, was their term for the female of the Geeyiy breed. But she sensed in their thought foci that they were preparing to ask her questions which might reveal evidence she was not what they accepted her to be.

Without waiting any longer she sent out the key combination. The carrier contact stopped abruptly. Automatically she opened her mouth wide to relieve the internal pressure against her eardrums in preparation for the blast wave.

Idly her mind was probing every mind in the shelter, sensing thought-states and future developments of thought-patterns. The adult female had noticed her pointed teeth as she opened her mouth. The adult male—she saw in one revealing glimpse the mystery of brothers being of two breeds, the Fighter Pilots and the Geeyiys—for these creatures had no breed consciousness and mated indiscriminantly. The female infant alone held thoughts of innocent friendliness on a par with those of the Zoiltos.

THE SHOCK wave, even at the three miles distance, was terrific. Zadha Omo blacked out for the length of time it took for her to drop to her knees. The Earthquake followed it without a noticeable pause, lasting the full space of one eternal minute.

Zadha was busy carrying out the hastily formed plan that had entered her mind. The three creatures were conscious. Quickly Zadha stripped off the wrappings of the female, studying the details of contour and altering her own form to approximate them.

There was a specific reason for doing this. When it was completed she

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looked exactly like the female. Picking up the unconscious infant, she tipped over the lamp, setting fire to the shelter. Then, with the infant in her arms, she fled until she was once again out in the open fields, the stars twinkling overhead, the landscape shadowy and obscured.

The warm proximity of the young female creature in her arms, coupled with the extra effort of carrying it, soon made her hungry and thirsty again. Walking gently, she cradled the young thing's head on her shoulder. She fed sparingly, exercising great willpower, for the young blood was rich and sweet.

"Perhaps," she thought hopefully, "I can collect a small herd of these young things to replace my dead Zoiltos. Then none of them need die."

* * *

Something had been deep in the subliminal reaches of her mind, bothering her. Now, refreshed with the sweet nourishment, she was able to analyze it and intensify it. It was radiation, of a sort. Not telepathic, but modulated pure tones. The modulations were very much like the speech sounds of the creatures, but meaningless.

There was a vague familiarity about them. Finally she placed that. It was the sounds the Geeyiys used, and so must be in their speech. Yet it wasn't sound, but radiation.

She analyzed the reactions of her nervous system to these radiations and finally decided, from the effect they produced, that they must originate from a high potential condenser type of radiator.

Idly as she sped along she let the Geeyiy sounds implant themselves on her memory. Later she could find a vocalizing Geeyiy and by reading its thoughts and associating them with the sounds it emitted, she could find the meanings of those radiation sounds.

Ahead loomed the shadowy hulks of abandoned and half destroyed buildings. They had been laid out somewhat like a city, lining both sides of wide lanes.

There were the ghost-fires of auras dotting the piles of masonry, and thought-foci centering at each. Suddenly the entire area lit up from a source of ultra-color. For a few seconds it didn't alarm her. She knew it was above the visual range of these hiding creatures.

Too late she became aware that they had sensitized glasses through which they could see what the radiation lit up. They had seen her!

Frantically she thought of flight—and read in their minds the knowledge that if she fled they would kill her. But along with that she read of their acceptance of her as one of the creatures they called "a woman." The young creature in her arms they called "a kid."

For some strange reason they didn't seem to want to let her know they were there. She read in their minds a confidence that she couldn't be aware of them.

She stole cautiously down the wide lane, wonderingly and hesitantly, until she noticed a place that might be ideal for her to hide in, which was empty.

She climbed over a pile of rubble and settled herself and the unconscious kid. Now, rapidly, she was learning the meaning of Geeyiy sounds, and understanding the messages she had picked up in the radio waves.

A STRANGE, an utterly fantastic picture was slowly forming from the bits of knowledge she was piecing together. The messages were concerned with the destruction of the ship. It was not the misinterpreta-

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tions they had placed on that which interested her, however. It was the fantastic realization that the creatures were totally lacking in breed lines, genetically.

Concentrating on that line of information to the exclusion of all else, she unravelled the radio messages, and probed questioningly into the minds of the Geeyiys hidden in the ruins nearby, and soon completed the picture.

It was—fantastic—and Zadha Omo wasn't conscious of that fact that the descriptive was becoming repetitious. They not only did not have semblance of breed affinity, but also they often did not realize individually what breed line was dominant in their structure.

"But why?" she asked herself, wonderingly. "And how?" She contacted thought-focus after thought-focus, and held them all in contact, sensing that they were not even able to recognize thought contact!

She grew bolder, holding direct conversations with them all—and they worried slightly, thinking they were getting "crazy" or on the verge of "nervous breakdown." Strange concepts!

"What is 'crazy'?" she sent out, and a hundred minds took up the idea and developed it from the personal angle, worriedly, thinking the question had arisen in their own minds. And out of the hundred mental pictures of "crazy" she gathered that "going crazy" was to develop latent mental powers which were agreed to be "crazy", and that, from their universal attitude, she was the epitome of insanity!

And they were all cattle breeds. Their normal source of food was dead and decaying vegetable and animal tissue, just as it was with the Zoiltos, though they were far less intelligent than even a defective Zoilto.

"Are there any of my own breed?" she asked wonderingly, inserting the question into the thoughts of the creatures about her in the ruins. The word, Fwoumie, gave no response—except that one center associated it with "zombie", which seemed to contain the proper understanding of the nature of a Fwoumie, but in a divergent, disassociated way. It seemed a zombie was a "living-dead" creature, and also a "drink," but with no connection in the two meanings.

Experimentally she created in each thought-focus the elements of Fwoumie desire for living blood—with startling results. One creature cut his own throat, and fell, his thoughts chaotic and almost, but not quite, accepting the Fwoumie norm. "Somewhere in the foundations of his mind," Zadha concluded. "Are the genes of a Fwoumie."

The creature had been with only one other in a small room. The other creature was fighting the Fwoumie hunger for blood Zadha had induced in his mind. She increased it, hoping to bring into its consciousness a memory of the existence of her breed on this planet.

Finally she gave up. There was only one conclusion to be formed. In this indiscriminately mixed mongrel brood of cattle there was no knowledge of Fwoumies, just as there was no knowledge of breeds.

There was a concept of "race", but it was a strange, meaningless concept —unless—

She forced the hundred or so thought-foci about her to dwell on that—and arrived at a picture of utterly rigid body form—creatures that thought themselves ugly and were not able to beautify their forms—creatures that thought themselves handsome, and thought it something to be proud and vain about. Creatures that thought themselves intel-

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ligent, but who did not have the intelligence to understand more than vaguely what intelligence was—confusing it with ability to remember, and with rudimentary skills they had acquired.

AND OUT OF all this, Zadha Omo gained a picture of millions of creatures attempting to destroy one another systematically for no reason, and engaging in the most depraved methods of bringing death—yet outraged and alarmed because they believed the enemy had used what they thought of as an atom bomb.

"Why!" Zadha exclaimed to herself. "Transposing one of their concepts to my own viewpoint, these creatures, due no doubt to the complete absence of a disciplining power, are all insane, and believe themselves sane merely because their concept of sanity is 'conformation to the norm'!"

The kid in her arms stirred restlessly, opened its eyes, muttered a sleepy, "Mama," and, putting its arms about her neck, sighed deeply and lapsed again into unconsciousness.

"Oui, mon Cheri," Zadha soothed, aping the tones of the kid's mother, now a charred corpse back in the ashes of the shelter, two miles or so away.

Three of the creatures who seemed in authority over all those gathered in the ruins were listening to what they thought of as a radio—an instrument to transform the monotone radiations into sound itself, and take those sounds and convert them into variations on a monotone radiator.

Relaxing, Zadha Omo concentrated a corner of her mind on the thought activity of these three as they listened to the radio.

An estimated two hundred thousand of the cattle had been killed by the destroying of the space ship. A breed—no, she would have to get used to considering them as classes of creatures, not breeds—a class of the creatures called Technicians was examining the area of the destruction, and seemed very amazed at the lack of radiation and unstable matter present there now.

Zadha was slightly amused at this amazement. These cattle evidently knew so little about nucleonics that they were unacquainted with the cleanly disrupting rocket fuels that left only a stable nuclei.

They seemed more alarmed than curious about their discoveries in the area. They recognized from their examinations that a type of explosion they were unacquainted with had taken place—but concluded from that that the enemy had made a technological advance over them.

There was a discussion over the radio, and even among the three Geeyiys, as to whether surrender or use of atom bombs would take place.

Suddenly Zadha's thoughts were electrified by a stray thought rising from the mind of one of the other Geeyiys, which he had unconsciously telepathed to her without being aware it was thought transmission.

The thoughts she had induced in his mind had finally born fruit. He DID know of others of her kind! But—she sagged in disappointment. They no longer existed. They had been known as Vampires. She coaxed along his thoughts, gently, not daring to alarm him and start up another emotional storm.

It took almost an hour to bring it all out. The creature kept trying to get its mind off the subject, still feeling a strange repugnance for it.

In the end she knew. The Vampires had not been a breed, but merely like all the rest—the result of chance combinations of genes in the gigantic shuffle—unable to breed true and survive.

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"Fwoumies whose parents were cattle and whose children were cattle!" she thought disgustedly.

That thought set a train of thinking going in her mind. Perhaps—perhaps it might be possible to take over the direction of life on this planet and isolate the various breeds into true ones again. In a few centuries or a few hundreds of centuries conditioning could be accomplished. The Fwoumie gene structure existed in the shuffle. It could be isolated. And her own could lend it strength.

THE THOUGHT of that made her shudder—to mate with cattle or less than cattle. But in the end she would be repaid by having her own kind about her—helping her straighten out the horrible, mixed-up life pattern, that created a norm of insanity and bestiality which graced a creature with noble qualities if he destroyed other creatures—but made him wretch or cut his own throat in the storm of psychoses set up by the personalized thought of feeding on living blood of creatures shaped like himself.

Of course, part of that came from the fact that all creatures on this planet were, in effect, one breed—a horribly mixed-up mongrel breed. There were the nature-forms. She had sensed those, too, in her explorations. They occupied their true status as food sources for the cattle.

"Perhaps—." Zadha fell asleep without completing the thought forming in her mind. And the kid in her arms slept on, with her, its hollow cheeks deathly white, its pulse slow and feeble, but growing stronger hour after hour as the Sun rose high in the heavens over the pile of stone and slowly settled in the west.

The excited murmur of conversation settled into an abrupt silence as all eyes turned to watch Major Sid Everheart cross the mess hall and take his place at the technicians' table.

Sid looked around at the eager faces, then relaxed with a tolerant chuckle.

"She looks rather nice," he introduced the subject. "For a former enemy. One of those terrible names, though. Zadhaomoski." A frown of self-annoyance crossed his face. "Gives me the creeps and gives me the impulse to make love at the same time. But she knows her stuff."

"What's her first name?" Major Joe Graem asked.

"For all I know she doesn't have one, Joe," Sid answered. "Madame Zadhaomoski is the only name she's given. From all she's told us she must have been right in the inner circle. Not only that, she's a scientist of a far higher callibre than I could ever hope to be. Knows the secret of the new bomb they used, and when we told her what our own latest bomb could do she told us at once more than we knew about it ourselves. It was the real stuff, too. We checked with Oak Ridge and they were ready to have us court-martialed for putting top secret stuff on the wires until they did a double take and remembered we couldn't have known the stuff because they just finished spending three hundred million dollars finding it out themselves, and hadn't told anyone at all!"

Several amazed whistles sounded over the mess hall at this bit of information.

"Then she's really a top enemy scientist!" someone exclaimed.

"More than that," Major Sid Everheart went on. "She's in on their plans, too. When she first walked into G.H.Q. day before yesterday the first thing she did was warn us of a thrust to the southeast of here. She gave us details. Number of men, type of equipment, times and places, and ob-

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jectives. She seemed as familiar with our own placements as theirs, too, indicating that she had access to their latest data. Her information saved a hundred thousand lives, at least, not to mention the fact that it enables us to hold the blast area awhile longer and keep the enemy from sending their own scientists to check up on the blast of their atom bomb. Two weeks have gone by since they dropped it, and they're getting anxious to get there before it cools off."

"Yeah, we know that, Sid," Joe Graem said impatiently. "Tell us more about this Madam Zadhaomoski. What's she like? Sixty? Fine old dame type? Oh, I forgot. You said you wanted to make love to her. Why didn't you?"

"Aside from G.H.Q. and Washington battling over whether she's more important here or at home," Sid said with a withering look. "She gives me the feeling that if I kissed her she'd be disgusted as I would if a slobbery hound jumped up and planted its wet nose in my mouth."

"That kind, huh," Joe said.

"No," Sid said, frowning over his food. "She just doesn't go for me. She's certainly a fine person, though. You ought to see the batch of thin, anemic looking orphans she brought in with her. G.H.Q. wanted to ship them off to a concentration center, but she wouldn't have any of it. She insisted on them staying. She sees that they got the best food, too. Even made us give up one whole officers' hut for her and them so she can even watch over them when they're asleep."

He ate in silence for a minute, the frown still on his face.

"I think she has a mother fixation," he added finally. "Probably had some kids of her own she had to sacrifice to desert when she came over. Thinks she can compensate for them by helping war orphans. I even heard a rumor that she insists on eating with them, and tries to give them all her food."

He shook his head in mystification and lapsed into silence while he concentrated on eating.

ZADHA OMO studied her features in the mirror. They were rather beautiful, she thought, though not from the standards of the Fwoumies. Their beauty was a sort of substandard mongrel type—shaped from the composite "dream girl" of a hundred or more high minded g.i.s.

She had laid her plans carefully, drawing on the well of information about her in the battle area, injecting questions in the minds of soldiers and getting answers back with complete safety, protected by the rationalizing properties built into the Earthman complex which made him believe impressed thoughts were his own, or—if he thought they weren't—made him keep quiet so his fellows wouldn't think him "nuts."

She had seen, and built on, the power of sex. Even so—she frowned darkly at the thought—these Earth cattle had an animal instinct against her that rested in the deep seat of the unconscious. To counteract that she had to build in each of them a strong desire for her, so they could rationalize their revulsion by connecting it with their sense of morality. It was a ticklish job, and would have been totally impossible with a non-telepathetic breed, or a telepathic one which knew its abilities.

She could—she smiled at the expression derived from a game of these cattle—stack the deck every time and deal off the bottom. But there was one part of her physical appearance which she could not change.

She opened her well formed—according to Earth standards—lips, revealing her even, gleaming teeth.

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Slowly from in back of the two eye teeth there came into view a tapering, needle pointed extra tooth—hollow, and sharp as a new hypodermic needle. They extended slightly forward below the eye teeth until they were about three sixteenths of an inch longer.

The rattling of the doorknob startled her. The fangs drew in instantly as she turned her head.

"Yes?" she called questioningly.

A child's voice, in French, said a man was there to see her. She answered in French that she would be right out, then hastily made a last inspection of her appearance. She wondered who it could be at this hour. It was time for the children to sleep and for her to—feed. She frowned in annoyance. She was hungry.

Her frown deepened as she contacted the mind of the creature. It was the one called Major Sidney Everheart, and he was here to begin what he considered his "courtship" of her.

"What a strange, mixed-up mind," she thought pityingly, as she studied his thoughts. His mind, as he paced back and forth in the first room of the Quonset hut, was filled with an instinctive revulsion for her—disguised as lust. Battling that conscious lust springing from subconscious revulsion was a desperately rationalizing pattern of noble desires arising from a pattern of sex ideals—and the objective of the inner battle was not to arrive at a true understanding of the revulsion, but to completely subjugate it and obliterate it!

SHE WAS in sympathy with that, but the ultimate objective of this creature would have to be thwarted. It was marriage and children—and the Fwoumie gene complex was so diluted in him that except for the fact that he was a member of the species that possesed it, he might as well be considered as not having it.

Still—she frowned at herself in annoyance—she had to admit she was lonely. And she had to admit that slowly and subtly the norm of this race of cattle was becoming less and less revolting to her.

She smiled at herself in the mirror before turning away, and the smile was as sweet and womanly a smile as any cattle might desire. It was still on her lips as she entered the doorway and advanced toward Major Sidney Everheart.

"And to what do I owe this unexpected visit, Major Everheart?" she asked in a throaty voice, rich with warm undertones.

"No reason at all, Madam Zadha-omoski," Sid replied, accepting her outstretched hand and holding it comfortably as long as good taste permitted. When he let go he turned away, hiding his facial expressions under the pretext of getting a chair for her. "I was—lonely—and thought perhaps you might like to talk."

"About what?" she asked innocently, beginning to enjoy the man.

Sid picked up two chairs and brought them to the center of the room where he placed them so they were neither facing each other formally, nor exactly side-by-side.

"About—what your first name might be, for one thing," he replied boldly. "And whether the 'Madam' to your name means you're married."

"My first name," she replied, sitting down and smoothing her dress, "is Zadha. The 'madam' is to frighten away would-be suitors." She followed this with a disarming smile.

"And also friends?" Sid asked with an equally disarming smile of his own.

"WHAT DO you make of it all, sir?" As the grey haired

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General asked the question all eyes turned intently, waiting for the X-ray specialist to speak.

"Frankly, General," the specialist said, shaking his head. "I don't know what to think. Look at that chin." His finger touched that portion of the blown up print. "In outline it is a normal chin—but look at it. There is a light area sharply delineated from a darker area, showing that the normal outline of the chin is a new growth—of cartilage. But according to standard shadings the old part isn't bone, either, but cartilage. Of course, I'm not positive of that, because the conditions under which these X-rays were taken could possibly have been bad—wrong voltage, clothing, the variable qualities of the thin wall hiding the machine and the plates, and so on."

His finger darted nervously to the roof of the mouth.

"And look at that!" he said. "If those aren't teeth I'll eat my hat. But look at them! Tapered to a needle point. Entirely in the roof of the mouth, but at an angle of forty-five degrees. And look at those sinus cavities connected to the tissue in back of them. Also, where's the bony roof of the mouth?"

"What do you make of it?" the General repeated.

"I don't know, sir," the man said. "I'd say you have a practical joker over there—or this is the X-ray of a vampire in the FORM of a human being. I say in the form of one, because the entire picture shows evidence of recent skeletal growth and perhaps equally recent absorption of parts of the old skeleton. Look at those knobs on the hands. They're as indicative of this creature having had seven fingers as a snake's hip bones are that it once had legs. Look at the skull. I'd venture a guess that the owner of that skull has a brain four ounces heavier than anything known before. Look at the senseless shadows in the torso. No way of telling what kind of digestive system it has—if it has one."

He took a deep breath and plunged.

"I'd say this is the X-ray of a non-human creature that gains its energy by drawing blood through those two teeth in the roof of its mouth directly into its own bloodstream. I'd say the creature has the power to change its shape within limits by the exercise of its will—indicated by its close imitation of the human skeleton which could only have been purposive. There you have it."

"That would mean those two pointed teeth are able to move out?" the General asked.

"Definitely yes," he replied. "Look at the cartilage surrounding each, and the lack of bone. And those teeth are almost an inch and a half long. They could move out a full inch and still be firm!"

"That ties in then," the General said, looking knowingly at the other officers in the room. "Proven knowledge beyond ours, and beyond that possible to the enemy at this stage, indicating a more advanced technology; proven knowledge of our movements that could only come through perfect telepathy—and of the enemy's movements that could come from the same power—or from being told by them. But that atomic explosion could not possibly have come from any Earth-produced bomb. It could have been a space ship, or it could have been a bomb set off to impress us in some way, or—and I hate to think of this possibility—with her proven alien origin and her proven supernormal powers, it might possibly have been a disruption of the matter in that area by some unknown force which she can produce at will. If that is the case we have something very dangerous in that woman. She might be the nearest

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thing to invincibility we can ever meet up with."

"I WOULD say, sir," an old man in civilian clothes spoke up. "That it couldn't have been an atomic explosion. If it had been there would have been after effects of induced radioactivity in the soil that could not have been prevented."

"Yes, I know," the General said politely. "We've been through that, and—"

"I'd like to ask a question," the X-ray specialist interrupted. "If this creature is able to read minds so easily, how does it—she—what I mean is, how did you keep her from knowing about these X-rays?"

"I can see you don't know how a modern war is conducted," the General said dryly. "We have our own group of men and women who can—sometimes—read minds. The enemy has also. We've built up a technique of doing things without anyone knowing anything. And," he smiled humorlessly. "She seems to discount our abilities considerably. So far she has shown no curiosity about routine duties."

"What has she shown curiosity about?" the specialist asked.

"Just people," the General replied queitly. "And chief among them are the fourteen French war orphans she brought into camp with her—suffering from anemia."

"God!" the specialist exploded. "So that's it! Why didn't you give orders to have her killed?"

The General suddenly looked grey around the eyes.

"I wish it were that simple, sir," he answered. "We don't know whether she could be killed, and if we try it she might destroy another hundred thousand men with another blast of some kind. Then, if she went over to the enemy, she would find them quite willing to give her plenty of victims for her supply of blood. The information about atom bombs she unwittingly gave us in her attempts to prove she was an emeny scientist has saved us three months and a hundred million dollars directly—and God knows how much indirectly, since the war is costing a billion and a half a day. Inhuman as it sounds, it is better to let her take her pound of flesh than to run the risk of losing the war."

"You'd better take that remark off the record, General," the specialist said, chidingly. His tone changed. "I wonder where such a fantastic creature could have come from? There must be more like her, some place. What a situation! A being from another planet or even, maybe, from a planet of another star. And unfortunately the human race would instinctively turn against her and her race regardless of their intentions, because the very idea of vampirism is so repugnant. Right now, if it was known to the general public, there would be a public clamor to destroy her—and I feel the same way about it."

"I know," the General said. "I wish I knew what to do. Even the President hasn't been told about this yet. It's a terrific responsibility. If we were sure she was alone, and could be made harmless, I would give orders to capture her. She could be kept alive and healthy by rigging up some sort of plastic feeding tube for her to sink her teeth in, and the blood she uses for food could be supplied by the blood bank. I—I'm glad I'm here in Washington. If I were over there I'm afraid I would do something foolish. I don't like the idea of those children."

"ZADHA," Sid said. "What a beautiful name. My grandfather used to sing a song about a girl named Jadha. You seem awfully

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young to be such a great scientist—Zadha."

"Oh, but I'm not," Zadha Omo said quickly. "That is, I'm—I'm twenty-eight. That's awfully old. And I've been a scientist for over ten years now. You see, I received special training to be a scientist."

"Yes," Sid said. "I rather imagined that was the way it was. You were fortunate to escape."

Zadha read in his mind that he was about to get up and walk over and kiss her! She wondered what it would be like to be kissed by one of these cattle. She was amazed that she could wonder what it would be like. And, suddenly, she was very lonely. Arotlan, her home planet, was fifteen light years away. There was not yet the technology on this planet to build a ship to take her back. There probably never would be unless she took control and shaped the civilization to that end. That might take a thousand years...

Sid's lips against her's were strong. The last bit of revulsion to this cattle receded into the background of her mind. She knew that later she would feel nausea at the memory, but right now she let herself go.

Suddenly Sid jumped away with an exclamation of pain. She saw the expression of horror on his face. Too late she realized that her own instincts had betrayed her.

She saw in his mind what he was going to do. Frantically she tried to change his thoughts—insert her own. She saw clearly why she couldn't. The cattle creature, unconditioned and unable to control his own system to any reasonable extent, had instinctively flooded his blood stream with Adrenalin. His suprarenal glands were on a rampage, and under the flood of adrenalin his behavior pattern was automatic—beyond control even by himself.

She saw the heavy forty-five automatic come out of its holster. She prepared to withstand the shock of metal tearing through her. And even as she prepared she kept trying to redirect his thoughts.

Then her mind was numbed by the force of the first slug as it tore through her. Quickly she constricted torn veins and arteries. But as quickly another slug tore into her and another, and another.

Dazedly she realized it would take days and days for the healing hormones to restore the damage. Her spine was shattered in several places. The skin of her back was ripped in a dozen places from the destruction of flattening lead as it passed through her. One of her hearts was torn badly and inoperative, and the arteries had constricted to shut off the flow.

The creature had stopped shooting at her, finally. It stared down at her blankly as sanity sought its way to the surface of its mind. The emptied gun hung slackly in a limp hand, and slipped out slowly, to land on the floor with a dull thud.

Then the creature turned and stumbled toward the door. It was gone. She read in its mind that it was going to get others. Even if it didn't, she would need help she could not get on this planet. The rich blood of real Zoiltos rather than that of the children. Zoiltos that would bend over her and let her feed on their blood. None of these cattle would do such a thing—could not do such a thing. Their instincts would prevent them.

Regretfully she made her decision. She would have to go home. It would take terrific energy. She would have to be careful.

A feeling of intense pity overwhelmed her momentarily for the creatures of this mad planet, so mixed up genetically, so unintelligent that they considered a dim spark of intel-

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ligence to be outstanding genius, so ruled by their emotions, and so—insane—that was an utterly new concept—so insane that the most they could achieve was a thin surface of rationality over a mass of psychoses and animal behavior patterns.

"I must be—very careful—children," Zadha Omo said, looking at the white faces staring at her from the doorway. She looked at them a long moment. They were her Earth Zoiltos, her pets. She had gathered them from the fields and the ruins of buildings. They had been ill and near death. She had fed richly on the sleeping adult natives and then filled her bloodsacs with plasma, rich in her own healing hormones, and sunk her fangs into their veins and forced the plasma in—to heal. They owed their very lives to her. And even they would vomit in disgust and horror when they learned how she fed.

"Goodbye, children," she whispered.

"THE PILOT just reported, sir," the soldier said, saluting smartly. "His plane will reach the field in twenty minutes."

The General nodded without replying.

"What happened, sir?" the specialist asked when the soldier had gone. "I got word to be here, but nothing more."

"It seems," the General said with a short laugh. "That one of the officers over there discovered what she was, and went temporarily insane—maybe permanently. He—and the body—are both on the plane coming in. He went mad and emptied his gun in her. Fourteen forty-five slugs—and she still lived long enough to make a good attempt at getting revenge. Fortunately she died before she could get her revenge working."

"You mean another big explosion?" the specialist asked.

"We'll never know," the General replied. "All we know is that the temperature dropped from eighty-seven to forty in a space of less time than the thermometers themselves could drop, an area ten miles across suddenly developed zero-zero fog, and it snowed over an area of two hundred square miles for three hours before winds set in and dispersed the low pressure area. It all began within fifteen minutes after the officer shot her, and right about the time those fourteen children stood in the doorway and watched her die."

"Fourteen bullets in her and she did all that!" the specialist said, awed. "Will I get a chance to examine that body?"

"It's all yours," the General said dryly. "Write a book about it. I want to read it. But right now I'm more interested in what Major Everheart has to say—if he's rational yet. The world may never know it, but he probably is the savior of mankind. I want to have a talk with him before the psychiatrists get him and restore his mental balance—by making him forget."

The two men stood side by side watching the plane as it came in for a landing, its jet engines cut off; and on their two faces were expressions of maturely subdued but nevertheless eager anticipation.

* * *

Major Sidney Everheart saw them standing there as he was led from the plane. Some corner of his mind registered the recognition of the General's features.

But it made no emotional impression on his mind. His mind was dulled except for one, dominating, horrible vision. It was the vision of the most beautiful woman he had ever seen or would ever see—the woman he had loved and hoped to

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make his wife when the war was over —her eyes alight with love, her cheeks flushed with emotion, and two pointed fangs protruding below her gleaming, faultless teeth, dripping redly with blood from two painful incisions they had made on his lower lip.

THE END

SALTY SOLARIUM

By SANDY MILLER

A NUMBER of sources are reporting on some new experiments concerned with house heating. This magazine has kept abreast of these developments including the "heat pump" or reverse refrigeration method. But even newer and more startling are some of the systems employed, which utilize the radiant energy of the sun.

Everyone is familiar with the fact that even the temperate latitudes, and even during the winters, a tremendous amount of energy falls upon the ground and is wasted. This sun-power has been tackled many times by scientists in an effort to harnass it. Until recently there hasn't been much success. It can be shown however that enough heat from the sun falls on the average house during the course of a winter, to warm it completely. The catch is, of course, that the needs of heating are constant while the sunlight is not. The problem then resolves itself into storing this useful energy.

It looks like the boys have finally licked it. Capturing the sunlight is no problem. It is simply a matter of constructing large glass windows in the roofs and attics of the homes, at such an angle and in such a position as to drink in the available sunlight.

Previously attempts were made to store the captured sunlight in huge tanks of water, but usually the volume of water required was so tremendous as to make the project impracticable. Now scientists have come up with a different approach. Why use water? There are certain other substances than water, which can absorb tremendous quantities of heat—notably sodium thiosulphate—Glauber's salt. This material which melts at about ninety degrees—an ideal feature incidentally—can store in the process of melting many hundreds of times the amount of heat of an equivalent quantity of water.

Therefore large tanks of sodium thiosulphate provide an excellent heat-storing system without too great a volume of material.

At present such an installation has been made in the East, and scientists are closely watching its success. To all appearances it is going to work very well.

If nothing else, these developments afford us an opportunity to learn a great deal about home heating methods in general. If electrical energy ever becomes really cheap and plentiful through the vast development of atomic power, of course, then there will be no necessity to think in terms of economical energy. But until that day, science is bending every effort to make itself produce an efficient, economical, sensible system for heating homes. The vast amount of energy consumed in the form of coal, oil and gas testifies to the desirability of knowing these things.

Demand has a funny way of producing an answer to a problem, no matter how insoluble it may seem—witness the atomic bomb.

EPISTEMOLOGY!

By WILLIAM KARNEY

THE SCIENTIFIC study of knowledge is a profound and worthy subject as anyone who takes the trouble may find out. Sir Arthur Eddington, that magnificent popularizer of not so many years ago, was fond of speculating and discussing this famous subject which has bothered men ever since thinking began. But even his discussions were rather ethereal and vague tending to lean heavily on introspective philosophy rather than a simple reason.

But not many years ago, a little book appeared called "How To Solve It" by G. Polya, a famous Hungarian mathematician now at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. This little gem of a volume was exactly what its title implied. In it, Polya gives an excellent and detailed analysis of the solution of problems, ranging from those in simple arithmetic to rather difficult algebraic and physical problems. The point of the book, however, is not the type of problem considered, but rather the *method*, the general line of attack.

While the primary subject of the book was mathematics, the methods of problem solving can be equally applied to ordinary, everyday thinking.

Dr. Polya approaches a problem in this fashion. First, he says, you have to *under-*

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stand the problem. Secondly, you have to find a connection between the data of the problem and the unknown portion of the problem. Thirdly, you carry out a plan of attack on the problem. And lastly, examine the solution obtained. In that little summary of techniques lies a wealth of information.

The value of the book exists in the fact that it shows that there is a general method of solution to all problems. While no two problems are alike, they have elements all in common. That is what we mean when we say experience helps us; the more problems we solve, the more readily these automatic attacks work and before long we have obtained an almost mechanical ability to dissect any problem.

Polya's book is written in an entertaining as well as informative manner. He makes working problems, fun. A funny thing about human beings, is, that they will inevitably respond to a challenge. Perhaps this characteristic is a carry-over from the early belligerancy of the caveman. Regardless, we take great pleasure in meeting and conquering something confronting us with an obstacle.

Polya also makes clear one of the causes of errors that continually plagues every person in the world. That trouble is simply the fact that we rarely take care—except in mathematics—to define exactly, whatever terms we are dealing with. When this is done, usually half of the difficulties are resolved.

This applies to problems of any sort—not only mathematical. How To Solve It is a system of thinking as advertised on the jacket—and a worth-while one. If you have problems and troubles it might pay you to look into it.

APPLIED ATOMIC POWER

☆ By CHARLES RECOUR ☆

NOW THAT some of the lids have been lifted off atomic power theory we are beginning to see efforts to utilize it practically. Private industry is demanding a greater share of activity in this field, And the government is at last beginning to open up.

In Britain and in the United States—no one knows about the Soviet Union—a number of experimental electric power plants are in the final stages of construction. True, these plants are small, but they are important in that they will point the way to large-scale operations. Electric power by atomic energy is here to stay, that's for sure.

There have also been several "stunts" with miniature atomic power sources whose outputs have been grossly amplified but this is purely experimental.

A very serious discussion of atomic power for ships has also been brought out by the Atomic Energy Commission and it is highly probable that this will be the first really grand-scale project. A ship, because of its huge weight and size is capable of carrying the vast amount of shielding and metal demanded by an atomic power plant. Thus it is likely we will see whips driven by this means before very long. The U. S. Navy is up to its neck in such a project right now.

Professors from MIT have been discussing recently the theoretical application of atomic energy to propelling a rocket. They have come to the conclusion that at present of course it is unfeasible. This is simply due to the tremendous shielding for any sort of a pile. A rocket would have to be monstrous in size to accomodate any sort of a power plant.

But they have worked out the reaction that will be used eventually. The atomic power plant, we learn, will be essentially a heater, a machine for providing tremendously high temperatures and great volumes of heat energy. This heat energy will be fed to hydrogen gas which will expel itself through the rocket tubes at terrific velocity thus propelling the ship. The hydrogen will not be burned as in a conventional rocket motor. It will instead obtain its energy from the heat sources—the atomic pile. There is, theoretically, almost no limit to the amount of energy thus available. But for the drawback of great weight, the atomic pile seems to be a likely prospect for rocket propulsion.

Such a ship would not fire its hydrogen while on the surface of the Earth for fear of contaminating the surrounding area with radioactive gas. It would probably use auxilary equipment until in free space where the ejected gases could harm nothing. It would be satisfying to get a glimpse into the secret laboratories that are considering this question and others like. It probably makes the imaginings of any science-fiction fan seem like the soberest of thinking.

Atomic powered rockets are some time in the future, but atomic powered ships are very near-reality. We'll see the old remark, "a teaspoon of material will propel the Queen Mary across the ocean" come true sooner than we think!

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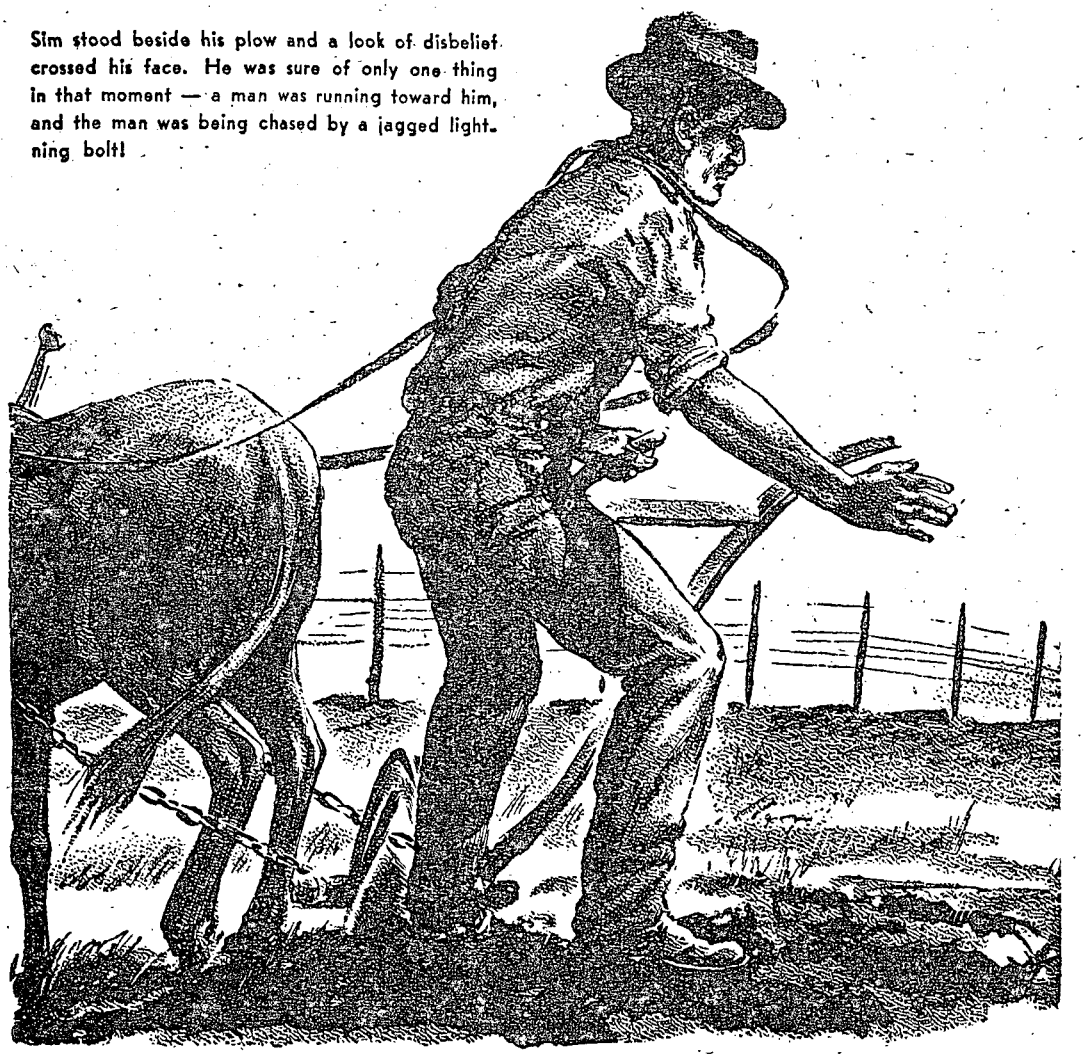
SECRET OF THE

By H. H. HARMON

Sim Potts got quite a shock when he saw the man running down the hill toward him — a bolt of lightning in hot pursuit!



Sim stood beside his plow and a look of disbelief crossed his face. He was sure of only one thing in that moment — a man was running toward him, and the man was being chased by a jagged lightning bolt!

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LIGHTNING

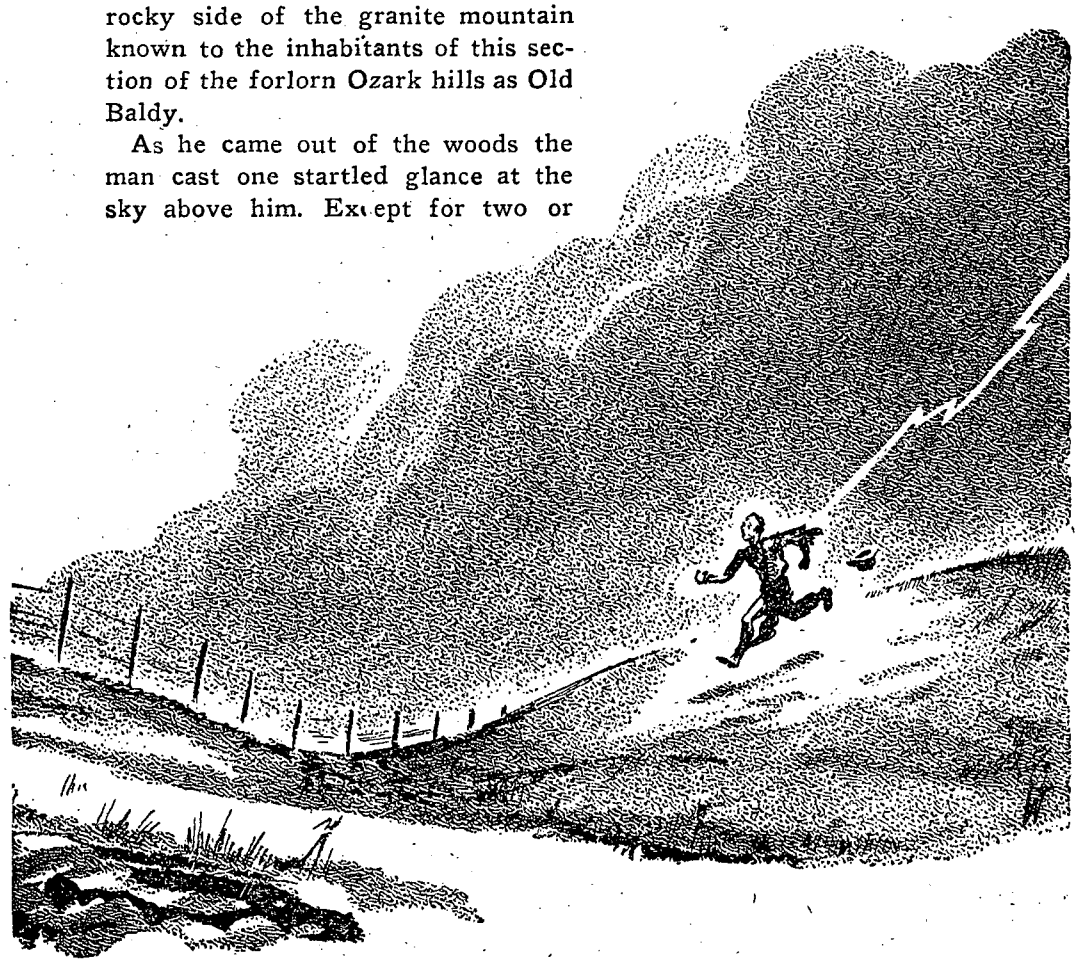
SIM POTTS, busy guiding a double-shovel plow pulled by an aged and reluctant mule across a stumpy field of knee-high hill-side corn, did not see the naked man come stumbling out of the woods on the slope above and start toward him.

The man was not quite naked. He still wore a belt and the fragments of a pair of pants and one shoe. The rest of his clothes had been torn from him as he fought his way down the rocky side of the granite mountain known to the inhabitants of this section of the forlorn Ozark hills as Old Baldy.

As he came out of the woods the man cast one startled glance at the sky above him. Except for two or three fleecy little clouds, which later in the day would become thunderheads but which now looked harmless, the sky was clear. But the man seemed to see or to hear something in the clear sky that frightened him. As if the devil was after him, he started running across the corn field.

He saw Sim Potts. And veered toward the farmer. "Help!" he screamed, with breath torn from laboring lungs.

Sim Potts heard the yell. He



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looked up. He saw the naked man running toward him.

Lightning lanced downward in a beam of yellow fire. Thunder crashed. A mushroom of dust suddenly swirled upward from the corn field. The wind caught it and blew it away.

From bulging eyes, Sim Potts stared at the sight. From a spot ten feet in diameter the growing corn was gone. The naked man was gone. Something falling downward through the air landed with a soft plop near him. He stared at it. The object was a belt buckle made of some bright silvery metal.

The belt buckle was all that was left of the naked man. Frozen to the spot, Sim Potts stood staring. Before his eyes lightning had flashed and thunder had roared and a man had been blasted to nothing. He was too stunned to move.

The mule snorted. And took off. Hearing the sound of pounding hoofs, Sim Potts looked around. Dragging the plow, he saw the mule running. Then, but not until then, did he remember that he too, could run.

Like a jet plane in a power dive, Sim Potts took off after the mule.

FROM THE edge of the woods, John Valder saw the bolt of lightning flash down from the sky. Thunder whooped and the dust cloud swirled and the running man was gone. Valder felt himself begin to shake. Tremors began to run through his body. Normal fear was an emotion he had thought had been left out of his make-up. He learned now that he had been mistaken. Definitely he was capable of desperate fear.

Glancing sideways, he saw that the kid, Jed Larkin, was in the same state. It was this kid who had brought him here to the slope of this granite mountain from the resort hotel twelve miles down the valley. Every year Valder came here to the resort, to rest, relax in the warm sun, to fish these clear, cold water streams and to roam these eternal hills.

Somehow the rumor had got around among the guests at the hotel that he was a scientist, which was true, though Valder would have preferred to keep this secret. Doing odd jobs at the hotel had been Jed Larkin. The rumor had brought the kid to him the way a bone brings a hungry dog.

Jed was the son of a hill farmer. He had gone through a one-room country school and by riding a scrawny mule eight miles each way every day, he had finished high school. This was as far as Jed had gotten though he had plans—rather impossible plans, Valder considered them—for going to college.

The kid had a keen, alert, inquiring mind, the kind of mind that at the right time and the right place makes an Edison or a Steinmetz.

When he learned that Valder was a scientist, the kid had adopted him. If Valder felt like playing golf, Jed carried his bag. If Valder went fishing, no matter what guide he hired in advance, Jed always turned up in the guide's place, poling a long-john river boat with expert skill and showing Valder with infinite patience how to catch fish when nobody else was catching them. If Valder went for a tramp in the hills, somewhere along the route Jed would be certain to turn up and act surprised as hell because he had happened to run into the scientist.

At first, Valder had been irritated. The kid was a nuisance! But the look of hero worship in Jed's eyes and the pathetic way he hung on every word the scientist said had eventually worn down Valder's resistance. He had come to like the kid. And—there

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were Jed's questions.

Valder soon discovered that Jed had read every book he could borrow, beg, or steal on scientific subjects, not only the standard works but the books on speculative philosophy as well, the little-known tomes dealing with the true nature of time, space, and matter, and what these words really mean. Behind all this reading, Valder sensed uneasy speculation. Jed was worried—about something. He had run headlong into some puzzle and was trying to solve it.

Valder, realizing what was happening, was worried not only about Jed—what kind of a mind did the kid have?—but about the puzzle that Jed was trying to solve. What puzzle was so great that a complete understanding of scientific thought and speculative scientific inquiry was necessary to understand it?

What monstrous demon haunted this hill-billy's son? Trying to discover the nature of this demon, Valder began asking quiet, probing questions. There followed a period of several days during which Jed seemed to be weighing the scientist, measuring him, probing under his hide to see what was hidden there. Valder realized that Jed was uneasy about him, that the kid didn't quite trust him.

Why didn't Jed trust him? Did Jed think he was some kind of a spy?

FOR SOME reason, Jed's distrust worried Valder. He watched the kid closely and he could see Jed nerving himself to tell his secret but each time Jed got up the courage to talk he seemed to shy away like a wild animal lured by bait but scared to death that the bait included a trap. Jed was scared, Valder knew, so scared that he probably would not have told his secret if they had not stumbled on to the running man. They had been taking a tramp in the woods when they saw the man. Most of his clothing torn from him, he was running down the slope from Old Baldy.

"There's another one!" Jed had gasped.

The kid had become wildly excited. "Come on, sir!" He had tried to catch the running man, with Valder puffing along behind, but the fellow had run as if the devil was after him and they hadn't been able to catch him. He had burst from the edge of the woods into the corn field and had yelled at the farmer plowing corn.

And had died in a flash of yellow lightning.

Valder had to force himself to walk out into that corn field. The dust cloud was gone, the farmer and his mule had vanished into the timber along the creek. Wind blowing across the field rippled the knee-high stalks of corn. The breeze was cool and pleasant. But not cool enough to dry the sweat on Valder's face.

They reached the spot where the lightning had struck. In a circle roughly ten feet in diameter the cove was gone. It had been blasted into nothingness, destroyed, disintegrated. Valder tried to think of a word to describe what had happened to this corn. His dazed mind gave him only the word *gone*.

The running man, whoever he had been, was *gone* too. Valder sweated. Things like this couldn't happen. Every year a number of people were killed by lightning, usually when they took refuge under trees in sudden thunderstorms, but never so far as he knew had there been an instance of a man killed by lightning striking from an almost cloudless sky into the middle of an open field and completely destroying the object it hit. And people struck by lightning had no

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forewarning that the bolt was coming.

The running man had known the flash was coming, Valder thought. He had run—like a fool, like a madman—trying to escape from the bolt of lightning or from something. But he hadn't escaped. Valder wiped sweat from his face. Beside him, Jed Larkin spoke.

"First time I ever saw it happen out in the open—when somebody else was around to see."

Valder's mind, as it grasped the meaning of Jed's words, crawled with living fear. "What? You mean you've seen this happen before?"

Jed's mouth hung open. From numbed eyes, he stared at the scientist. "I—I—" In this instant, Valder knew that at last Jed had revealed his secret. In the shock at what had happened, the kid had forgotten the fear that had kept his mouth closed.

"Is this what you've been trying to get up the nerve to tell me?"

"I told once, and nobody seemed to believe me. I wrote about it. I was scared you wouldn't believe me either." Jed looked longingly toward the shelter of the woods as if the thought to run was in his mind.

"And you've seen this happen before?"

Jed nodded. "Twice, I've seen it. Other times I've seen the places where it had happened."

"Just like this, you saw it? A man struck by lightning as he tried to run?"

VALDER thought the kid would back up and change his story. But Jed didn't back up. "The two I saw were trying to run," he insisted. "I don't know if the others were trying to run or not. I only saw the places."

"Places?"

"Yes, sir. Like this." Jed nodded toward the circle of brown dirt from which the corn was gone. "In the woods, the brush and leaves were burned away. Usually it happens on the rocks and there's not much sign left—just the granite looks kind of cooked is about all there is."

"How many times has this happened?" Horror sounded in Valder's voice. His mind was refusing to accept this data as valid. Under other circumstances, he knew, he would have regarded Jed Larkin as crazy. Just stark raving mad. But here before this circle in the corn, with the brown baked earth leering nakedly up at him, his mind could not take refuge in the belief that the kid was crazy. He, John Valder, had seen this thing happen too—with his own eyes.

"Lots of times," Jed answered. "Two or three times a year, maybe. It's hard to be certain about the old burns. After a couple of years, the brush grows back and covers them up. This—this is the first time this year."

"Has anybody else seen this?"

"I don't know, sir. I don't reckon they have."

"But surely the people around here must talk about it."

"Nobody except me around here has got any idea it's happening."

"But Jed, people don't get struck by lightning and vanish without somebody asking questions. They'll be missed. This man—" Valder tried not to look at the leering circle on the ground. "—will be missed. Inquiries will be made."

Jed shook his head. "I don't think so, sir. Nobody who lives around here has ever been struck by this lightning, so naturally there hasn't been anybody asking questions. The people who get struck—" The kid paused and again Valder had the impression

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that Jed wanted desperately to run away.

"What about the people who get struck?"

"They come from somewhere else," Jed said. "They never belong around here."

"Where do they come from?"

"I don't know about all of them. I talked to one. He—he came from New York."

"What was he doing here?"

"He didn't say."

"Did you ask him?"

"Yes, sir. Of course at the time I talked to him, I wasn't sure he was one."

"And he wouldn't talk?"

"It wasn't quite like that. I sort of got the feeling he didn't know what he was doing here. He acted kind of dazed and maybe scared. Most of all, he didn't have time to talk. He had to get somewhere—in a hurry."

"Where did he go?"

"He got hit by lightning."

"You saw this happen?"

"Yes, sir."

Either the kid was a remarkably competent liar or he was telling what he sincerely believed to be the truth. Valder watched him closely. The kid was scared—this much was certain—but there was an honesty about the rugged face and the gray eyes that could not be mistaken. Jed believed in himself and in his story. But—was the story true? Valder, considering the implications of this story, felt gray fear walk through him.

Here, to this rugged granite mountain located in an out-of-the-way section of the world came occasionally wandering men to keep a date with death striking in a flash of lightning! Who were these men? What did they seek here?

VALDER DID not consider the question of what they found here. All too obvious before his eyes was the evidence of what one man had found.

"Have you any proof that this has happened before?"

"Proof?" Jed didn't seem to understand the need. "But you saw it happen—"

"I thought I saw something happen to one man," Valder answered. "But I know better than to trust my eyes in any one instance. Our eyes lie to us, Jed. Our minds lie too."

"I know," Jed said. "But—proof?"

"Proof might be anything that would back up your story that this has happened before."

Jed studied the problem. Suddenly his face lightened. "I could show you the burned places," he said.

At the words, Valder almost wished he hadn't asked for proof. But he had asked for it, now let him look. He followed Jed away from the cornfield and up the slope of the mountain.

Hours later, coming down the mountain, with a thunderstorm muttering off in the distance, Valder wished more than ever that he had not asked for proof.

He had gotten what he asked for.

He had seen the burned places. Spots in the grassy woods like fires made by picnickers. Smudged spots on stone-like fires built by campers Old places were the new green growth was vigorously pushing through again, hiding the scar left on the earth by what had once happened here. Burned places!

Even this had not been enough to satisfy Valder completely. After all, these burned places might have been picnic fires. How could Jed prove they weren't that?

With a stick, Jed had dug carefully in one of the burned places. He had turned up what had obviously once been a silver coin—a half dollar. He had found a quarter, the charred rem-

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nant of what had once been a penknife and an object that looked like it had once been a cigarette lighter.

"Stuff they had in their pockets," Jed had explained. "The metal doesn't burn. Sometimes this stuff is blown pretty far away but usually you can find something in the burned places, if you look real carefully."

Valder shuddered. There was such a thing as asking for too much proof.

"You've been studying this a long time, haven't you, Jed?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Since I was eleven."

"Since you were eleven—" Valder choked. At the age of eleven, boys ought to be flying kites and playing ball, they didn't have any business meddling with, or even knowing about, things like this. Most boys, of course, wouldn't have known what they had found, if they had run into these burned places. To them, they would have been spots where picnickers had toasted wienies. But Jed Larkin was one in a thousand, maybe one in a million, who had eyes sharp enough to see beyond the obvious and a mind keen enough to grasp what lay beyond the bare facts.

For years, Jed had lived with this mystery. Suddenly Valder saw what lay back of the books Jed had read, the abstruse theories the kid must have studied with puzzled, painstaking care. Jed was trying to find out what the hell was going on here!

"What do you make of it, Jed?" Valder asked.

"I don't know, sir. I just don't know." Jed hesitated, longing on his face and Valder suddenly realized the vast hunger in this boy, for somebody to talk to, somebody who wouldn't laugh at him, somebody who knew what was happening here, somebody who might understand and help him. Books were well enough. They helped. But the lonely heart needs a friend. Valder saw also why Jed had attached himself to him. Jed thought he might help. Here in these hills there was no one with enough imagination and intelligence even to realize that the mystery existed. Jed hoped that he might be such a person. The kid needed help, desperately. But how to help him. Also how to help himself.

"I think there are things here that we can't see," Jed said. His gaze went around the woods, darkening now with the coming of twilight.

"Ghosts?" Valder asked.

"Maybe, sir. I kind of think of them as aliens instead of ghosts. Non-human. There isn't any word for them. Things we can't see or hear or feel."

If we can't see or feel or hear a thing it doesn't exist," Valder said weakly.

"You know better than that, sir," Jed spoke quickly. "You can't see a radio wave, or hear it either, until you send it through a receiving set and turn it into something else. Radio waves are going through us right now and we don't know anything about it. And—you can't see an X-ray with your eyes, but a strip of film sees it. One of the guests at the hotel had a dog whistle, once, that was pitched so high nobody could hear it. But when he blew it, his dog heard it."

VALDER WAS silent. What Jed said was literally true. The five senses of a human being have definite limitations, they perceive only a part of the universe, probably only a very small part. For a moment Valder mused on the infinite complexity of the universe, trying to find words to express the dark impressions coming out of his own mind. The effort was a failure. There were no words. Until the words were invented and the meanings found for them there was

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not even a way to describe the impressions present in his own mind.

Off in the darkening woods an owl hooted. A breeze, pressured by the approaching storm, began to creep through the trees. The leaves rustled softly and the air seemed to have an electric pressure in it.

"Why do you think these people come here, Jed?" Valder questioned.

"I think they are compelled to come here, I think they can't help themselves," Jed answered. "I think something calls them—and they come."

"But somewhere they will be missed," Valder objected. "Somewhere somebody will inquire about them. Then the bureau of missing persons will start checking. Eventually even the FBI will get into the picture." The thought of the FBI worried him. He wondered why.

"If they don't have any close friends or any families, probably no one will ever start looking for them," Jed pointed out. "They've got to be missed, first, before they are looked for. If a man in New York suddenly quits his job and says he is leaving town, but comes here instead, maybe there won't be anybody to start looking for him."

Suddenly Valder shivered. The picture the kid painted was entirely possible. It could even happen to him. He had no close friends and no family. If he disappeared, a few perfunctory inquiries might be made but the matter would end there. In the United States there were millions of people who could literally walk off the face of the earth with no questions ever asked about them.

What was happening here? What purpose was being served here, with lightning and thunder and sudden death?

All over his body Valder was aware of the moving feet of fear.

"Jed—"

The kid was not looking at him. Jed had turned and was staring at the top of a tall oak tree. His attitude was that of a person listening carefullly for the repetition of some sound he thinks he has heard of, trying to see again some sight he thinks he has seen.

"What is it?" Valder whispered.

"Sh—" Jed answered. "I thought I saw—"

Valder was aware that the kid was trembling.

"The light," Jed whispered. "I thought I saw—oh! There it is again!" Sharp-fear sounded in the whisper.

Above the dark top of the tree, against the clouds moving in the sky, a light was visible. It looked like the beam of a searchlight thrown against a bank of clouds. It flicked on for a moment, then was gone.

"I call it the hunting light," Jed gasped. "It always comes before the lightning. I think it's used to find the spot where the lightning will hit."

"Lord—"

Off in the hills thunder walked across the sky.

"Was that another one?" Valder gasped.

"No. That was real thunder. It's hard to tell them apart but I know that wasn't—"

Above them, against the clouds, the light was moving, circling like a hunting dog that has scented quail but has not quite located where the covey is hiding. The light veered off.

"You mean there's a man here somewhere and the light is hunting for him?" Valder whispered.

"Yes," Jed said.

Abruptly, like a hunting dog that has finally located the right direction, the light came back.

"It's hunting us!" Jed yelled. "Get out of here."

Brush crashed as the kid started to

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run. "Get out!" his yell came.

John Valder needed no further warning. Jed had disappeared, vanishing in the dark growth. Valder started running. Glancing back over his shoulder, he saw that the light was following *him*.

Fear such as he had never known before rose in him.

Every nerve-ending in his body screamed at him, "Run!" Like a madman, like a fool, driven by the pressure of exploding fear, he ran. Tree limbs, briars, tore at his clothes like invisible hands snatching at him. In his mind was only one thought—to escape from that light. He had to escape, had to, had to! Breath gasped from his laboring lungs. He tripped and fell, scrambled to his feet, and ran again in headlong flight. Over his shoulder he tried to see if he had lost the light.

He hadn't lost it. Instead, it had gained on him. It was closer than before.

He tried to run faster. Deep in his mind he knew it was a hopeless flight.

Within a quarter of a mile, the light caught up with him. For an instant it raced along exactly over his head.

He screamed. "Help!"

The lightning flashed.

Thunder rolled through the hills.

The shrieking pain that jolted through John Valder struck at the very roots of his being. The sensation of tremendous pain, he had. Then he had nothing.

Soft rain began to patter from the sky, turning into red mud the baked earth of the new burned place.

HE AWAKENED in torment. The memory of that searing agony was on him, torturing him. Knowing that it would pass, he waited. When it was gone, he opened the orbs of vision that were his equivalent of eyes. Total memory came flooding into his mind. He knew now what he had not known before, who he was and what he was. He knew also where he had been and why.

He was in the equivalent of a bed in what looked like a hospital room but which he knew to be part of a laboratory. Bending over him, a worried expression on his face, was a technician whom he recognized. The creature once known as John Valder grinned. This was old Klardon. Klardon was always worried about something.

Valder twisted wryly. "That separation is a jolt," he said. He was referring to the process that ended in the lightning flash. "Especially when you don't know it's coming. It seems to me that we ought to be able to work out some way so we could know when we are going to be separated, to save our nerves, if for no other reason."

"We always have this same complaint," Klardon answered. "But if you took enough memory with you to know when the separation was coming, you might unwittingly reveal too much. The Council considered the matter and decided it was not well to allow anyone to take any memory of any kind—over there."

"I know," Valder said. It was a wise decision. Creatures who knew nothing could reveal nothing. "But it's a jolt, just the same." He shuddered at the memory of the fear he had felt, the way he had tried to run, and the the searing agony that had flashed through him.

"The body you take with you, the human body, must be completely destroyed," Klardon pointed out. "Otherwise a careful analysis of the structure by competent technicians—presuming such exist on that level—

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might reveal the alien nature of it, which in turn might reveal too much about this level. Also, the body must be destroyed to separate from it the essential mind matrix which returns here. No, I am afraid there is no choice as to the manner of separation. The pain you explorers feel must be real and the fear must be real too. Otherwise you might give too much away. We must protect ourselves at all costs. Also, the pain does not last long."

There was, Valder knew, no point in arguing. Also, he actually had little to argue about. The memory of searing pain—what was this to a fourth level intelligence such as his?

"You are ready to begin your report?" Klardon anxiously questioned. "It is important that you begin as soon as possible, while your experience is still fresh in your memory. It is necessary that we have every possible detail, to fill in the gaps left in other reports."

"I suppose I'm ready," Valder said. There was something worrying him, he couldn't remember exactly what. Well, let it go, he thought. It wasn't very important anyhow, if he couldn't remember it.

The instrument that Klardon brought him would not have been recognized as a pen by any human being but that was what it was. With it, the creature once known as John Valder began to write—

REPORT OF ESTOVAL, KNOWN AS JOHN VALDER, TO THE COUNCIL OF SCIENCES, CONCERNING FURTHER EXPLORATION OF THE THIRD DIMENSION—

In minute detail he set forth his experiences from the day he had first arrived in the third dimension in a body equipped with a false set of memories. He set down what he had seen and heard, the nature of the creatures inhabiting the third level, the nature of the transitional surface existing between the two dimensions, and, in exact detail, a summary of the mineral resources of the third level. This last was of great importance to the Council. There was only one thing that was of greater importance and this was to keep secret from third-level creatures all knowledge of the exploration taking place in their world.

SUDDENLY Valder stopped writing. He remember now what had been worrying him. The kid—Jed!

Jed knew a great deal. There was a strong possibility that Jed knew, or would eventually discover, too much. Jed might even discover how to make the transit to the fourth level!

Valder rose to his feet. He went directly to the main laboratory. Technicians scurried at his entrance, hurrying to do his bidding. "Here is the scanner," he was told. "What do you wish to see?"

He told them what he wanted to see.

The vision screen used to probe the third level lit up, revealing a stretch of dark woods dripping with rain. The scene shifted as the technicians, under Valder's directions, searched frantically for what he wanted them to find. A hill, a little river, a corn field passed rapidly across the screen. Then—

"Hold it," Valder said.

On the screen was the image of a running kid. His clothes dripping with rain, his tortured lungs heaving, he was running as if the devil was after him.

"Focus!" Valder ordered.

On the screen, the image of the kid firmed in place. Now, as he turned

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his head to look in frantic fright at something that hung above him, his fear-tortured features were plainly visible.

"In focus, sir," a technician said.

Valder's hand moved toward a red button. He started to push it—stopped. Did he have to do this? After all, Jed was a darned nice kid. Earnest and sincere and honest and desperately anxious to know.

That was the catch! The kid was anxious to know. Give him time and the kid would find out.

Valder firmly pushed the button.

Jed Larkin saw the hunting light come into existence above him. He tried to scream. For an instant the light held above him and for an instant he dared to hope that he might escape.

Then the lightning flashed and the thunder roared.

* * *

SIM POTTS came very cautiously through the dripping woods. He had a flashlight, which he used very carefully.

"Jed!" he called. "Jed."

There was no answer. Deep in his heart Potts knew there would be no answer ever.

Potts had changed. The shambling gait of the hill farmer had dropped from him, the rather vacant expression which he habitually kept on his face was gone how. Instead his face was lean and alive and exceedingly alert. There were lines on his face because of Jed, but under the pain there was resolution and grim determination.

Jed was—gone. That hurt. It was Jed's letter—which he had thought unanswered—to the FBI that had brought him here, although Jed had never known this. In times like these, with the atom bomb loose in the world, with biological warfare a possibility, with national tension mounting, every strange event was being investigated by competent investigators. He had dug into several himself. There were saboteurs in the U. S.A., spies, and members of the fifth column, nobody knew what.

But no spies as strange as these! The kid, Jed, had been telling the truth. There was no question about it. Potts had seen the burned places, like picnic fires in the deep woods, the lightning, and heard the thunder.

What was it all about? What was happening here? Trying to think of the answer to these questions, Potts shivered. One thing he knew—here on the slope of this granite mountain the human race was in touch with the unknown. Unless the speculations of some of the more advanced mathematicians and the more mystical of the scientists sprang from a source they had not chosen to reveal, no man had ever guessed at the existence of the trail that started here.

No man? Well, Jed Larkin had guessed it. Because of Jed, other men would come here, men who were competent to investigate this phenomenon, they would come with instruments capable of detecting sights that the eye could not see, of hearing sounds the ears could not register. When his report had moved through the proper channels, there would be a large-scale but well-disguised invasion of this region. The top scientists would be here.

Thinking of the lightning flash that had overtaken Jed, as the kid tried desperately to run for safety, Potts' lean face darkened. Somewhere, sometime, in some world, that flash of lightning would be avenged!

Off in the dark woods an owl hooted in the night. From the dripping trees, raindrops pattered softly on the greening, eager earth.

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HUNTER TABOOS

★ By MILTON MATTHEW ★

IN LAOS, AN elephant hunter, before starting out on a chase, instructs his wife not to cut her hair or oil her body till his return. He believes that if she were to cut her hair, the elephant would break his bonds, and if she were to oil her body, the animal would slip through the ropes.

When a Dyak tribe has gone out into the jungle to hunt wild pigs, the ones who remain at home are forbidden to touch water or oil with their hands during the absence of the hunters. They believe that if they did so, the hunters would have slippery hands and the pigs would run right through them.

The elephant hunters of East Africa believe that if their wives are unfaithful to them in their absence, the elephants will have power over them and will kill or wound them. If a man hears of his wife's adultery during a hunt, he will return home immediately so as not to risk being killed. If a Wagogo hunter is unable to get his animal and is attacked by a lion, he blames it on his poor wife and runs home to give her a terrific beating. It is a rule that when he is away on a hunting expedition, the wife may not allow anyone to walk behind her or let anyone be in front of her as she sits, and when she goes to bed she must lie on her face. Life would have been more simplified for the women if their husbands stayed home and let the women do the hunting.

The Moxos Indians of Bolivia believed that if a hunter's wife was unfaithful in his absence, he would probably be bitten by a poisonous snake. If such an accident did occur and if the hunter lived to get home, it always meant severe punishment for the poor innocent little woman.

SUBSTITUTE CHEMIST

★ By WALTER LATHROP ★

WE ARE SO overwhelmed with new scientific instruments that it is difficult for us to keep our perspective. But all science is not a matter of new instrumentation—some very old tools—like the microscope and the spectroscope—are more and more useful with each passing day. Consider the spectroscope. It is simple but useful.

Newton's discovery of the refraction of light through a triangular prism opened the world to the knowledge of light, and in the early nineteenth century, Joseph Fraunhofer's study of this effect produced modern spectroscopy. When a beam of light is passed through a triangular prism, or reflected from a plate covered with fine lines, the light is broken down into its individual component frequencies, which appear of course as different colors.

The major fact about spectroscopy however is that each chemical element when excited to a high temperature gives off light which by its definite line-position in the spectrum, identifies itself uniquely. For example, if a bit of sodium—from ordinary table salt—is incandescent in a flame and viewed through a spectroscope, several distinct bright yellow lines can be seen. This is true of sodium anywhere and at anytime. The lines always show up when sodium metal is present. Thus we have a means of identifying that metal and the same thing holds for all other metals and gases—in fact, all elements.

If the light from the glowing sodium passes through a cloud of gaseous sodium at a cooler temperature, the former bright lines appear as black lines, but as definitely located. These are called absorption spectra and are exceedingly important. It was through observation of this type that helium was discovered on the Sun before it was known on the Earth.

Now spectroscopy has advanced to the point where it is being used wherever chemical analyses must be made. Steel mills and other industries which require instant analyses use the spectroscope to give them the answer. It takes hardly any time at all to put a piece of metal in a flame or arc, and photograph it through a spectroscope.

The spectroscope has been hooked up to numerous electronic instruments and has become what might be called without exaggeration, "a robot chemist." The utility of this system, coupled with its speed makes it out-perform the old-fashioned "wet-analysis boys."

Astronomy and physics are lost without the spectroscope. Our knowledge of the constitution of the stars, of the nature of atomic energy, of the very nature of matter itself, is due to this versatile instrument in good measure. Even in such relatively humble undertakings, as in police analysis work, the spectroscope has put the finger on more than one law-breaker. And each day more and more uses are discovered for this wonderful versatile tool.

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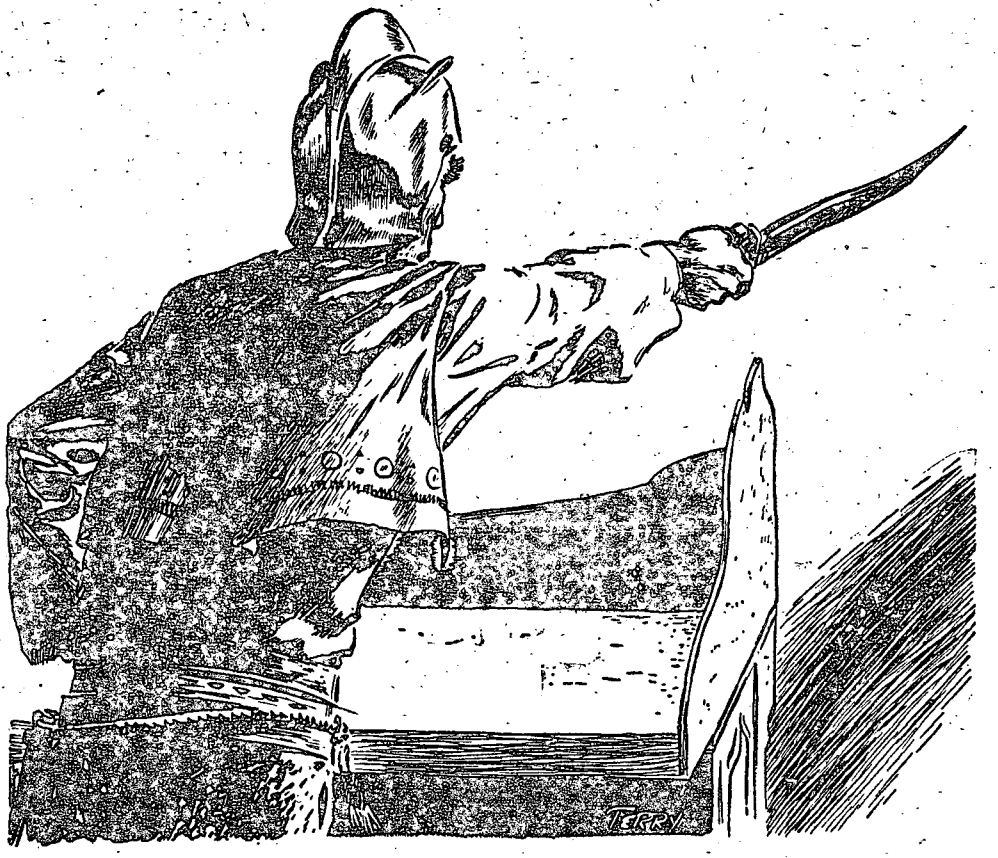
GATEWAY to DESTRUCTION



GORDO MAJUS laughed aloud and the sound screamed back at him from every corner of the tiny, one-man cabin of the destroyer. Back there in the stern lay a half ton of At-62. A twist of the dial so close to Majus' right hand and the stuff would be let loose in a spray so fine no sieve could contain it. Yet the sheer weight of it would make it drop with an inexorable finality, and when it landed there would be a gigantic puff of smoke, a puff of smoke which would never disperse, but would be the shroud for the globe spinning so far below.

Of course Gordo Majus would no longer be alive to know what happened but that mattered little beside the greater and more important fact that he had destroyed a world. His brain seemed to have room only for the one fact. He was an avenging angel. And vengeance was the sweet-

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By HARRY GORDON

The Elders had spoken of a Hell and had made it a reality in a world where there was nothing real—only death and destruction

est thing to hold.... Sweeter even than the love of Jan, sweeter even than the death of Harod....

His hand moved to the dial, closed on it, and twisted hard....

* * *

Harod, Lord Master of the World, was addressing the Council of Elders. His lean, handsome face, proud and oddly brutal as the face of a Satyr, held an inscrutable look, yet one which could be defined as aloof, for though he spoke directly to the ten men seated about the circular table, he seemed not to see them.

"I have called the Council together," he said in his crisp, authoritative voice, "that they may know my desires in a new matter of importance.

"But a short time ago peace was finally declared in the world, peace, for the first time in a thousand years. Now I have received knowledge that this peace can but be temporary—"

A murmur broke about the table, a murmur which was stilled at the imperious gesture of Harod's lifted hand.

"—Hold! My source is unimpeachable. Therefore I must order a re-

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newal of the life previous to the declaration of the end of the war. New issues, decrees, orders, must be evolved and transmitted to my people, and since you, the Council of Elders, are the court supreme in my land, I am making it plain to you that these orders, etc., shall be made known as quickly as possible."

Once more the voices rose, this time in distinct sounds. And from the far end of the table a man rose. He was thin, emaciated to the point where he seemed but a skeleton clothed in a robe. He was Janus, the oldest of the council. His voice was atremble with emotion, strained with feeling:

"Harod! I do not question your sources, or the reasons for asking what you do...."

"I am not asking," Harod broke in. "I am *telling* you what I want."

"....Very well, Harod. Your word is law. But ours is the voice of its interpretation. How can we interpret that which no longer has meaning? I have lived for three hundred and fifty years and all of my life has known nothing but war. War, war, death and destruction. The insanity of it must stop. No book, no written word has come forth in all these hundreds of years but do not extoll the virtues of killing, of dying in the name of conquest. We are no longer humans, we are no longer creatures of kindliness, of love. We are but spiritless shells which go on, acted in automatic gestures learned by rote. We are the Council and *I* am its voice, not you. You may *order,* but only I can command obedience to that order!"

A SPARKLE of life showed suddenly in the face of Harod. He had known that this might happen, had prepared for it. His eyes swept the faces of the ten Elders, paused momentarily on each, and came to that of Janus.

"The Elders," he began, "have become too old. They have outlived their usefulness. In their old age they have permitted themselves the folly of emotional thought, if such a thing can be. Society has gone far beyond that, and you have been left behind. Yes, your days of use have ended.

"Therefore," his long sword suddenly slipped from its scabbard and flashed in the soft light of the room as its length described a long arc and crashed to the table-top, "I am going to end them. As of this moment, the Council of Elders no longer exists, either in name or being. Marrit, Banor...."

The two officers who had dashed into the chamber at the sound of the sword's crash came to rigid attention.

"....Take these old fools out and execute them. Immediately!"

But his was not the last word. Janus, ever the stoic, did not permit the smallest of emotion to trouble his voice; "As you wish, so shall it be. But think not that it ends thus. The voices of fifty million of your people who live within the walls of this city will rise one day and drown out the sound of arms and the voice of your madness. Take us. We are ready...."

Harod's eyes became hooded in thought. He had dismissed the Elders the instant they were ushered from the room by the swords of the two men he had called in from the anteroom. But the words of Janus lingered in his mind. They gave him food for thought.

There *were* fifty million people within the city walls. His lips twisted wryly. Fifty million *creatures,* would be the more correct word. Yet creatures or men, he needed them. This war wasn't going to be

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like the last. This was going to need every soldier, every airman, every worker! He simply couldn't afford the slightest rebellion. His fist slapped the wood of the table viciously in sudden decision. If needs be he would have them killed at their benches or in the fields. For there were more ways than the sword to make them stay in line. Once, in the long ago, when there had been nations, one of them, the Japanese, had formed a something called, thought police. Harod, whose brain was once called the most alert in the world, remembered the use the Japanese had put those thought police to. Well, the peoples of his city and all the other cities under his domination would know them.

Harod turned and called, "Savor ...Gordo...Makin... Hunan! This way."

The four entered at his call. In a few terse sentences, Harod gave the command his brain had formulated. The command from which no one would ever find escape. *Fear!* From henceforth fear was to be the lot of every living being. For no one was ever to know who would be the one to tell, the one who would deliver them to the executioner.

GORDO MAJUS turned from reading the bulletin on the wall, his face suddenly drained of color. So the rumors had been founded in fact. The wording had been quite explicit: *"Every airman, without exception, is after date posted, on the alert."*

Just like that. A laugh, harsh and bitter as the dust from the field of battle welled from Gordo's lips. A couple of fellow pilots, on their way to the lift, turned their heads in wonder. But though Gordo knew his anger was futile and even worse, helpless, he could not help his feelings. He and Jan had planned marriage. They had planned other things. Once, on a reconnaissance flight over the Volga, Gordo had seen a plot of ground which to him was like something out of wonderland. Just the thing, the thought had struck him, for their place they had planned. And it would be so simple, he had thought. After all, he was a Major, and as such he would receive not only preference but the allotment of ground he desired.

And all that was contingent on the end of the war. So it had ended some eight months before. He had wanted to be relieved immediately but his superior had begged him to stay and help with the desk work until the battalion had been completely disbanded. That had been eight months, less ten days ago. Ten more days.... Once more Gordo laughed aloud. Ten more days and he would have been decomissioned. And that notice would have been a meaningless jumble of words, and not the doom to the future it spoke of.

Despair broke in a sigh from him. He turned left at the foot of the stairs and trotted up the short flight leading to the world outside. His tall, broad-shouldered figure, trim and smart in its airman's uniform, the insignia of gold bright in the afternoon sun, made many an eye follow him as he moved swiftly toward the corner where a tram would stop.

It was strange that now his eyes saw things they had never perceived before. He had never realized the number of uniforms to be seen. Why, everyone wore a uniform of one kind or another, and for the most part they were not uniforms of the army or air force. These other uniforms were alike in every detail and it was hard to make out the sexes, so alike were they.

His tram ground to a shuddering stop and he boarded it, his uniform

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making it unnecessary to pay fare. Jan lived at the far north boundary of the city, close to the shadows of the great wall bounding it at that point. For the first time in his life Gordo Majus became conscious of extraneous things, like the look in a man's eyes when they are tired and without spirit. Or the hands of a woman who has known nothing but the task of labor meant for a man. So many, and all without even the shadow of a smile.

It was different in the air force or the army. Why, Gordo had known men to smile even in the face of death. But these, was there so little of value left in life for them....? He had to turn his eyes away and look down and his own widened slightly when he saw his clenched fists on his lap. It was the outward sign of an anger so deep, so vital it crept up from the wells of his subconscious.

Then the beginning of the mile-long stretch of twenty-story high hive of city dwellers came into view and Gordo moved to the front of the tram. In another moment he would be holding Jan Smith in his arms.

UNLIKE so many of her sex, Jan Smith wore no uniform. Her work as a secretary in the office of the Air Force Command gave her that privilege. And though she did not know it, her apartment too, was not like the others in her section of the building. It held a charm, a grace, an aura of graciousness which would have been impossible to find in any of the others. For that matter Jan herself was grace, and charm, and good manners. She could not have been Jan Smith and not have those qualities.

The buzzer sounded and Jan turned from the stove and ran to the door. She flung it wide, stepped forward and embraced Gordo with a fervor which always surprised him. It was as if she had never expected his return, and so had to show the outward wonder of it that he had.

He kissed her gently and held her away from him, grinning widely into her eyes.

"Hello, baby," he said. He sniffed appreciatively. "Hey! Y'mean it's steak for the prodigal's return?"

"For my air hero, nothing is too good," she replied, whirling away in a dancing pirouette, the end of which landed her on the threshold of the kitchen. "There's something to drink on the sideboard, my love, and cigarettes in the usual place. Dinner will be ready in a jiffy."

Gordo stretched his long, lean legs straight out until they stuck out beyond the table's edge, sighed deeply and undid his tunic.

"I'd almost forgotten the taste of good food," he said. He was still savoring the steak. "Honey, I can't wait to get married. Let's not wait. The marriage court is open evenings. Come on!"

He rose and stretched one hand toward her while with the other he buttoned his tunic. A look of unrestrained joy came to life in her eyes at the gesture and in a second she was around the table, her hands outstretched toward his. And suddenly the music which had been on the tele-audio combination died abruptly, and a voice came on.

..."*All officers and personnel return to their bases,*" the voice said. Three times the message was repeated. Then the music returned.

But in the hearts of the two clasping hands the music was gone forever. They looked deeply into each other's eyes and each knew the other had knowledge of the reason for the message. Gordo turned from the girl with an infinitely weary move of his

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body and stepped to the couch in the living room. She followed wordlessly and sank down beside him.

"When did you learn?" she asked.

"This afternoon," he said. "And you?"

"We've known for a week, now," she said. "Herta Savor is my boss. He came in the day he got the news from Harod himself. The big-mouthed animal let it out immediately. Yes, my dear, it's true. Another war. And this one is going to be the biggest of all, the most destructive. For a long time Harod has been exploiting the people of Mars.

"He has always managed to stay on the good side of the big fellows, but his ego simply couldn't stand the strain of it. We won the last engagment on Earth, only to find it wasn't the last battle after all. The code of war is Universal now. No more atom bombs, no more bacteriological warfare, no more germs or hideous weapons of destruction. Just swords and daggers.

"And thought police!"

AS UNANNOUNCED as the stranger at the wedding feast, a vision came to Gordo Majus. There had been two among the hundred or so who had gotten off the tram at the same station he had, who were man and wife, by the symbols of the rings about the marriage finger. It had taken the second glance to see which was which. But in all else other than sex they had been the same, particularly in their manners. The man had walked first, she a few steps behind. They walked stiffly, heavily, as if each carried a burden too great for them. And Gordo felt a sudden anger that the lot of such as these was due to the super-ego of one man, Harod.

"....Darling..Gordo!...."

'Huh? Oh, I'm sorry, honey. I didn't hear you."

"I know. You frightened me; there was such a look of, of I don't know what on your face. It was so strained, so savage," the fear was alive in her voice.

He reached over and brought her close with a quick gesture and took her heart-shaped face between his fingers and kissed her hard. She gave him a troubled glance and felt herself tremble at his passion. Yet she knew there was something deeper than that in his gesture.

"What's wrong, dear?" she asked. "Was it the mention of the thought police?"

"Thought police? I don't understand?"

"Something new Harod dreamed up. Savor told me about it. He told me something else too. You know, he has the power to advance you, up to the grade of General."

"Look, honey," Gordo stopped her. An instant before what he was about to say was the last thing he imagined would ever enter his mind. Now it was all that filled it. "Tell Savor to save his promotions. As of this second I am no longer a member of the air force."

"No—no longer a member.... Gordo! Don't even think of it!" there was horror in her voice. "That's treason you're talking. I mean it's desertion. They'll put you to the sword for that."

"If they find me," he said. "Look, honey. There are fifty million people in this city. Remember the time I came back on leave. I had ten days and we spent the time together on the lake. I got a set of coveralls from the commissary because I wanted to fix the boat. You still have them, I'm sure because you said they would come in handy some day. Well, the day has come to put them to use. Bring them out...."

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"No, Gordo," she was worried. "I told you about the thought police Harod dreamed up. It's so simple and so devilish. The smallest act of insubordination is to be reported and it is the duty of every citizen, in his own words, to report any act. Why, the man next to you on the tram may be a spy, the girl who waits on you may be one. Suppose you do not tip her, or say hello in the right tones? For something like that you may die. I would rather you took your chances in a fight. At least there it would be your skill and daring against another's. Please, for my sake, forget what you are planning."

He knew then, what had really been in the back of his mind. Not just to desert. But to make the millions of others desert. To make them drop the clothes of slavery and become men and women again. He knew this next war was just another in the endless series. Win it, and Harod would find new fields of battle. There was no end to that insatiable ego. He had to be stopped!

"The coveralls, please!" he said coldly. "Jan! You must choose! It can't be otherwise."

She turned her face from him, and her head lowered. Then she got up and walked to her bedroom. When she returned the coveralls were over one arm. He took them from her without a word, stepped into the bathroom and closed the door. When the door opened it was to show him dressed in the grey material. On his arm was his uniform. He tossed it to the couch and said:

"Burn this. I don't want anyone to know I've been here. Thank God, no one knows of us. Jan. You haven't given me the answer I want to hear. Say what I want to hear."

"I—I can't, Gordo. Oh, it isn't that I'm afraid. Surely fear is something I'm too well familiar with. All these years of waiting. Years when I never knew if you were even alive. But now, well, maybe the long waiting has frozen me in. Maybe I've reconciled myself to a life where nothing matters. A life without happiness...."

Certain words came to Gordo then.... 'Savor told me.... He has the power to advance you to the grade of General....' So that was it. Well, let it be then. And yet the steel hadn't hardened. For he broke out against her: "I see it now. I should have known when you brought his name up. How was it my name was brought between you? So that's how matters stand? Savor will do *any* favor of your desire. Then go to him! He deserves such as you....!"

The tears didn't begin to fall until the door closed behind him. And even when his footsteps died they streamed from between the lids while her shoulders jerked in a paroxysm of sorrow....

HAGAR, SUPERVISOR of the third plant in the second district, looked through narrowed eyes at the man before him. He didn't quite like what he saw. This one stood too straight, his eyes met one too fully. Hagar liked his workers to stand in attitudes of fear and terror, with head bent and eyes lowered. Still, it took a while for men to learn to stand thus. And this one was a young man. Hagar smiled to himself. Then his eyes fell on the order which had come through. And the smile was gone from his heart. A hundred hulls, the air ministry wanted! And in a month's time! What did they think he was going to make them of, paper? Why from the plans he'd seen they were going to be large enough to hold a hundred thousand men.... He damned the air ministry wholeheartedly, as he turned his attention to the man before him, again.

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"So you are an expert on controls, eh? Ex-air force, eh? Bah! Babes in woods when it comes to practical stuff. But we need men. Okay. Report to section chief Gomez. He's in plant 22. Here is a card of entry. By the way, what is your name?"

"Felipe Mondes," Gordo said. "I live in the Havda Building."

There was nothing in Gordo's eyes to show his elation. He had prepared quite throughly for this interview. He had rented one of the warrens in the giant Havda Building, for an address, should they ask. The name, Felipe Mondes, was not chosen casually. It was the name of his first chief, who had died when a shell landed in the cockpit. There was nothing much left of Mondes except part of his tunic. And in that tunic was his identification card. It was the same one Gordo handed over to Hagar.

The supervisor gave it a perfunctory glance, and finished making out the permit for Gordo. He handed it over and said, "Okay, Mondes. Just one thing. We tolerate no foolishness. Or mistakes. The first is the last. I hope you understand...."

Gordo bowed his head, picked up the permit and departed.

Gomez proved to be a harried little man whose office was in a tiny corner of the huge plant. He flung one hand through his thinning hair, made a face of utter despair and yelled at the top of his voice, as if Gordo stood a hundred yards off, "Hang Hagar! Blast the officious fool! Now don't misunderstand me, young man. Hagar is a gentleman and knows his business better than any one else. But doesn't he understand that I need experienced men?"

"I have experience, sir," Gordo said

"Yes, yes. Experience. I know. I've had many like you. All with experience. There were a few, I'll admit, who proved their worth. But so many, ah, so many who are now wipers." Gomez sighed, turned in the swivel chair and leafed through a file "Know anything about the X-265 engine?" he asked without turning.

It was sheer luck which made Gordo pause. Another second and he would have said, yes. But he remembered the X-265 was top-secret even now. Only ten men knew about it. It had been he who had made the only flights in it.

"X-265?" he asked. "No, sir."

"Well, we're going into production on it. A hundred of the blasted things. And the hulls, also." Gomez turned back to Gordo again. "Report to Jackson in the dynamo room. He'll know what to show you."

THE SILENCE of the vast room was the first thing Gordo noticed. Not even the huge air hammers made sound. Since the harnessing of cosmic energy made the use of atomic energy a thing of the past, all mechanical things ran in silence. But of even greater interest was the silence of the workers. They were like automatons, their hands moving, their bodies jerking sometimes, but always with eyes glued to the guages, or instruments, or machines they were operating. It was to a flanging engine that Jackson assigned Gordo Majus, alias, Felipe Mondes. And from that moment to the one he left it forever, Gordo fell into the tempo and silence as if he had been born to it.

Ten thousand men and women worked in factory No. 22, the men and women separated in different sections. But they ate in a common cafeteria. Only there was the silence broken. Gordo made no attempt to break the air of restraint he had laid on himself, for several days. But all the time his ears and eyes were alert for something which would give a

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clew to the tempers and disposition of his co-workers. And after several days he had a pretty good idea of where to sow the seeds.

He had fallen into the habit of eating with a couple of men, Jarvis and Borso. Borso was a stocky Eurasian, Jarvis a tall, gaunt Westerner. Though different in appearance as day and night, they held many other things in common. Borso was one of those men of vivid, descriptive phrases, harsh critical words. Jarvis spoke little, but when he did it made sharp analytical sense.

It was on the sixth day at lunch, that Gordo threw a crumb to them. "Looks like we're gettin' ready for something, doesn't it?"

Jarvis said nothing but bit harder at the meat in his mouth. Borso, however, said something from the side of his mouth, "Lower your voice."

Gordo let the remark pass but knew he had scored. Borso wanted to talk. "Saw Falmond looking at a blue print the other morning and managed to sneak a glance. We're not building pleasure ships."

Both men digested Gordo's remark for a silent moment. This time it was Jarvis who mouthed a soft something, "You see too much. And talk too much. Who knows but that there might be a microphone under our very plates....?"

Gordo's reply was barely audible: "There are no mikes in my room."

The wry smiles the two men gave him was the answer he had been waiting to get....

"MAKE yourselves at home," Gordo said.

Borso laughed harshly as his eyes took in the bareness of the room. He pulled a cane chair back from the table in the kitchen and straddled it. Jarvis followed silent suit. Gordo remained standing, his back against the kitchen door jamb.

"Y'know we might be risking our lives coming here?" Jarvis said. "You might be one of the thought police."

"I might, and again I might not. But if either of you is, well, I'm not long for this world. You see my name is not Felipe Mondes. It's Gordo Majus, ex Major in the air forces, the man, the only one who has flown the X-265, the engine we're making at 22. And I'm the one who can tell you what it's being built for. A new war. A war against Mars. Does that interest you?"

"It sure in hell does!" Borso broke out. "What I want to know is, what are you doing as a slave in a factory?"

"Because I decided, in the space of a single second, not to take it any longer. I got tired of being a slave, a slave whose will was not his. I decided to stop being a slave. Want to hear more?"

"Hold it, Borso," Jarvis stopped Borso, who had opened his mouth. "Go on, Gordo. Better call you Felipe."

"Oh, it's rather simple. Harod has five million men guarding this city. He has ten times that in uniform and on the alert. But the important thing to remember is *this* city. It holds the heart and brains of his whole empire. More, he himself lives here. Any revolt," he paused to let the word sink in, then continued, "any revolt against him *must* start here."

"My dear Felipe," Jarvis said, leaning his chin on the back of the chair, "has it ever occurred to you we *might* have had similar ideas? Because if it hadn't, we have. However, just because we haven't been able to circumvent certain obstructions, perhaps you may be able to. Proceed..."

"Quite simple, really. Harod, himself, gave me the idea," Gordo said, smiling. "This thought police idea he

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thought of. It's new. Not more than a couple of weeks old. But you men have been working in 22 for a number of years now. You know everyone there, the stool-pigeons, the foremen's favorites, the very ones who stand in our way, because they're the very ones who will be first to be thought police. All we have to do is beat them to the punch.

"For example, let us say Borso talks to one of these men. I pass by just then. Borso lets it be known that this man is speaking sedition. They both get called in. And Borso calls me as witness...."

"You don't have to go farther," Borso broke in. "We get it. Why, between Jarvis, myself and a couple of others we know, we can canvas every factory in town...."

"Thus getting out of our way the very men who are in a position to make trouble for us," Jarvis finished for the other. "H'm! Give us a couple of days to think it over."

It was agreed thus.

THE NEXT time they met there were four new faces. And from the opening words Gordo knew Jarvis, Borso and the others had gone into the matter quite thoroughly. There was but one thing. Gordo didn't want himself brought into the picture. One of the others wanted to know why and oddly, it was Borso who answered. "He has reason enough for not wanting himself brought in. We have enough men for that. But let's get all the details straight...."

The conference broke up late but when it did they had gone into the matter fully. Borso and Jarvis stayed on for a short while after the others left.

"I saw you trying to break in several times," Jarvis said. "I think I know what's worrying you. We spoke only of the large factories, like number 22. Don't worry about the smaller ones. Maybe a million or so people work in the others. The large ones are the ones which count. And each of the men who were present tonight hold key spots.

"What's more," Jarvis said, "They will pass the word along to others like us."

Gordo had been pacing the floor, though he hadn't realized it. He stopped, slammed a fist into a palm, and grated, "Damn! I don't know why, but I'm worried as Hell. Can we trust them?"

The two, Jarvis and Borso seemed a lot less worried about it than Gordo. In fact Borso, whose expression was usually dour, smiled widely. "Felipe has the failings of all the others who have spent a lifetime in the service. To them the whole world was wrapped up in a war. You knew nothing of what was going on here, how history was being made. For example, as territory was conquered the population was absorbed by this country. First it was this country and the rest of the world and after a while it was a commonwealth of nations, headed by ours. I'm a Eurasian, though the term has become obsolete. Jarvis was once called an Englishman. There are no such things. We are one, now. Therefore it will be a revolt of *one* people. Understand?"

Gordo shook his head. Of course. It was the one fact Harod forgot to take into consideration. In the old days a man could play one nation off against another, one race of people against another. Now it was all changed. Gordo's face broke into a wide grin.

"I'd like to see Harod's face when things start to happen...." he said....

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HAROD'S FACE was a mask of fury. The men seated about the circular table which had once been used by the Council of Elders looked at their leader with mixed emotions, of which fear was the principal one. They knew Harod and his vicious temper. And each, as he watched Harod pace the circle of the table, wondered on whom Harod's fury would fall.

Harod stopped his frenzied walk and faced them, his legs spread, his head thrust forward, his eyes slitted and searching. "I have listened with small patience," he said in measured tones, "to the variety of excuses each of you have offered in his own defense. Bah! You should know me well enough to know I don't like excuses. We are at war! I am trying to get a hundred carriers into the air. I have gone into this *very* thoroughly. Each carrier will carry a hundred thousand men, ten million foot soldiers all in all. And supporting them, a hundred thousand planes. So what happens?

"Two months have gone by and four ships, *four ships* have come off the lines! Suddenly there are wholesale desertions from the ranks. I read the worker's papers and there are veiled threats. And all I get from you are blank faces! Do you want me to wipe the blank looks from them? I can, and you know only too well, how effectively. One week more, I give you! After that...." he left the rest open. They filled in the rest. Without a further word, Harod turned and stalked from the room.

For a long moment there was silence, broken at last by Savor, head of the air ministry. He was a gross being, thick-fleshed, with a muscled, jowled face whose lips were pendulous like that of a pig, and whose eyes held small spots of viciousness in them.

"Our leader," he said, "is angry. His precious Thought Police are not working their charm as he thought. My men still manage to escape the prison of their servitude. Shall I make my point, if I may coin a phrase, more barbed? But we understand each other. Our necks are in jeopardy from the same sword. I like my neck in its present condition. Besides, I am about to be married...." He smiled amiably at their shouted congratulations, and continued. "Thank you. My Jan is a beauty. Therefore it is more understandable why I want to live. So we must arrive at something satisfactory. I would say that Hunan is our man. It is he who has charge of production, therefore he who should be able to spot the source of revolt. Yes, revolt! Harod did not call it that, but perhaps the truth is not palatable to him."

Hunan, whose predominating characteristics were his lack of color, drew himself erect, his face flushed. His voice was high in anger: "How dare Savor...?"

"Save the tears for later, Hunan," Savor said coldly. "I am not accusing you of anything. But I say the whole damned thing starts in the factories. You have a card system from which you can trace the sneeze a man made on a certain day three hundred years ago. Check the cards. The clue to it all lies in that. It is the way my Jan showed me how to trace my missing flyers. And it never fails."

Hunan's eyes went wide. Savor was right. Hunan felt anger such a simple answer hadn't occured to him. On the other hand, Hunan was shrewd enough to realize Savor had let the cat out of the bag by mentioning his to-be wife, Jan. Well, it wouldn't take more than a day to find what he wanted.

"Savor is right," he said. "That will take but one day. Let us meet again the day after tomorrow,

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then...."

They left on that note.

HUNAN'S face showed the excitement he felt, as Savor called them to order.

"I have them. The whole lot. But I didn't realize how spread out they were. Like insects they have honeycombed the smallest plants. Just in time, too. Makin, you are head of the police and military. I have the names, addresses and all other information of every one of them...."

Makin, a hawk-faced man of erect military bearing, whose voice was like an icicle, said, "Good, very good! Yes. I will take care of them. Tonight. I will have my office force put them in order and by the end of evening, this incipient revolt will be but an unpleasant memory."

"I think Harod will be pleased," Savor said. "And I don't mind saying, my collar no longer feels too snug."

They understood only too well what he meant....

* * *

Makin's police force was very thorough. It was well-known for its efficiency, and its ruthlessness. The police were smiling as he dictated the notice for his subordinates. The stenographer took his notes to his office and made out copies of what had been dictated and despatched them in his usual efficient manner. Then he placed his hat on his head and went home. At least that was where Makin thought he was going. But it wasn't to his home, he went. It was to Gordo's.

Gordo had planned quite well. He knew there were certain things he had to figure on. One of those things was the possibility that their plans might be unearthed. So he had made it a point to approach certain people, like the stenographer. It paid off now. As usual, Jarvis and Borso were in his room when the knock came at the door and the man was admitted.

Consternation and despair were on their faces at the message the man delivered.

"What will we do now?" Borso asked, his heavy voice low in horror.

"Whatever we do," Gordo cautioned, "we must not lose our heads, either figuratively or literally. First, get word to the night shift men! Sabotage the machines first, the engines and hulls later. Then get word to the men at the armories to pass out weapons to the people. The revolt must begin tonight. Now, Jason, you are Makin's confidant. Who discovered us?"

"Hunan," Jason replied. "But it was Savor's woman, someone named, Jan, who gave Savor the idea...." He stopped and stepped back in fright at the look of savage anger which came to life on Gordo's face.

"No! Not Jan! I don't believe it! But why not? She said she was going to choose. So that's it. All right, men. Let's get moving. You know what to do. I'll attend to something first and join you at the appointed place...."

Jan Smith was applying the last of her make-up when the knock sounded at her door. She wrapped a gown about her nakedness and opened it expecting a messenger from Savor. He had promised her a thrill for that evening. Her face whitened beneath the powder when she saw Gordo standing on the threshold.

HE CLOSED the door softly behind him and took a couple of steps forward. She retreated before him. A crooked smile came and went and her tongue licked her lips which had suddenly become dry.

"Why, Jan," Gordo said. "You seem frightened. But of course. You were expecting someone else. Savor....?"

"Why-why no, Gordo. What makes

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you say that?" she said, making an effort to contain her panic.

His shoulders shrugged as he maneuvered her toward the couch. The back of her knees came into contact with the edge of it and she fell backward on it. Gordo stood before her, his right hand toying with the dagger he brought to light from under his coveralls.

"It's a funny thing," Gordo said. "But suddenly the whole world is a place of friends or enemies. Just like war. There are no more neutrals. It's for or against. Follow me, Jan....?"

She made a supreme effort then. Her features became more composed. She folded her leg over the other, exposing a length of naked calf to the knee. She leaned back in such a way he could not help but notice she wore nothing under the gown. Then she said:

"I don't quite know what you mean. And *do* sit down! You make me nervous, pacing back and forth like that...."

"But I'm not pacing," he reminded her. "And you have a *right* to be nervous. I would also, in your position."

"I'm not nervous. I mean in the way you mean. It's just that your visit was so unexpected. After all, the last time you were here I got the impression you were never returning. Especially when you asked me to make a choice of your own choosing. Dear Gordo, my so-foolish air hero. Why couldn't you be more reasonable? You could have been a Colonel...."

"Would that be better than the minister of the air force?" Gordo asked pointedly.

Her eyes brightened in anger. "I don't like insolence," she said.

"I don't like *women* like you," he said, making a grimace at the word women. "The first thing I learned in the air force was to kill, shoot down, get rid of, whatever came in my way. I have come here for just that purpose. You are in *our* way. Not *mine* anymore. Our. It is because of you that millions of people are going to lose their lives tonight. Theirs will be a cause worth dying for. You will die, as you have lived, a complete nonentity, without reason for being alive. I loved you with all of me, with my entire soul, hungering as it was for your love. I also had no reason for being. Now I have, even though it will mean my death. So, dearest mine, I salute your death...."

She didn't expect what he did. He suddenly reached over, pulled her toward him, kissed her strongly and released her again. She fell back, and as she did the whole of her gown opened and the whiteness of her flesh and all its beauty was exposed. But already staining that whiteness was the crimson of her life's blood. And stuck deeply in her breast was the short dagger....

He got up slowly, wearily, his head turned aside. For though he had killed her, he still loved her. He walked to the door and it closed on him with a finality not to be denied. And as he left, the woman on the couch gave a last gasp and from her lips a crimson tide spilled, staining the rest of her body the same color.

THE STREETS were alive with people. Jarvis and Borso had done their work well. But so had Makin. Makin's men were outnumbered ten to one but they had in their favor the long years of training in the art of murder. And not all of the people had a chance to arm themselves. But where barricades had been erected and men stood behind them, Makin's police found tough going.

Jarvis, Borso and the men from plant number 22 were waiting Gordo's return. Not a machine was in work-

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ing order in the plant. The two had seen to that. The hulls and engines of the hundred the plant was to turn out were almost completely destroyed. A huge barricade had been thrown about the plant. Gordo arrived a few minutes before the police and military did.

"Now this what I've been wanting to do all my life," Borso said. "Look, Felipe! The fire squads have set to work...."

Gordo turned and looked in the direction of the pointing finger. The whole horizon was alive with leaping flames. But now the enemy was at hand. Makin had seen the best-trained men he had to number 22. They came in long lines of marching men and from every direction.

"To work, men," Gordo said quietly. "We only live once."

The attack came instantly. A hundred battering rams were put to work, manned by thousands of soldiers and police. But savage as their attack the defense was even more so. Men died and were buried under the men following until at all the points where the rams were hurled, piles of dead reached higher than a two-story building. Long before Gordo had stopped counting the dead, or the strokes he was using. It was stroke and hack, stroke and hack.

But little by little the cream of the defenders, the younger men, were chopped down. And slowly the rest had to retreat. There was no place to go other than the factory itself. Somehow, Jarvis, Borso and Gordo managed to stay close to each other. At the end there were perhaps a couple of hundred men left. It was then Gordo realized that they had lost.

"Listen," he said tersely. "There's but one chance. The airport. We've got to get one of the big carriers. I can fly it. Let's fight our way out. Those mobile carriers the troops used to get here will get us to the port...."

As one they turned and began to fight anew. And this time it was with a savagery none could withstand. The attackers gave way. Slowly at first, then gaps showed wider in their lines, and then they were the defenders. The break through came all at once. A bare hundred and fifty men streamed in a wild dash toward the mobile carrier at the far corner.

But when Gordo counted noses he saw that Borso was missing. Jarvis, his coveralls covered completely with gore, breathed the news in stertorous gasps. Borso had died, fighting as he had lived.

The wide, spacious concrete of the tremendous area that was the airport came into view. The carrier slowed and the men stepped wearily from it. What they saw confronting them made them lose hope completely. A long line of swordsmen, the cream of Harod's army, stretched in a long triple line across their path. Harod had planned his defense well. Beyond them, Gordo and the rest saw the lines of sleek destroyers and the tremendous carriers. But it was on a number of destroyers set aside from the rest that Gordo's eyes fell. He knew what those ships contained. At-62, cosmic dust, the deadliest thing known to man, lay within the hulls of those destroyers. A mad plan came to Gordo then.

The revolt was broken. He knew it. Harod had won. And once more the Earth would know war. Well, perhaps it were better that the Earth was destroyed....

"Men!" he shouted in ringing tones. "See that destroyer?"

They understood. "We'll get you to it," Jarvis promised.

He kept his promise, as did the others. The last thing Gordo saw as he leaped into the cockpit and with

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a savage twist of his hand set the destroyer swinging into the blue, was the body of Jarvis, spitted on the long sword of one of Harod's soldiers.

* * *

Gordo Majus twisted savagely at the dial. He could see the cloud drift toward the spinning ball below. *AND A BALL OF FLAME BECAME ALIVE IN MAJUS' BREAST, A FLAME WHICH WAS QUENCHED WITH HIS LIFE'S BREATH....*

THE END

HOT ROD HOPEFULS

By RAMSEY SINCLAIR

WITHOUT a doubt, Americans are the most mechanically-minded people on the face of the Earth. An American can't look at anything but it a book or a machine, without wanting to improve it. Where else in the world do you find such a vast number of amateurs in everything ranging from astronomy, radio, home workshops, to auto rebuilding? Obviously nowhere. The material wealth of our country makes it possible for almost anyone, has he sufficient desire, to indulge in any kind of work he wants.

Wartime showed that this encouragement payed off. We were able to produce many skilled technicians overnight—formerly merely hobbyists.

Americans love to tinker with automobiles—and always have since the very earliest days of the gasoline engine. For a while it was practically a cult in which millions engaged. Then, as improvements were made, the automobile became such a standardized and thoroughly reliable machine, that home auto-mechanics went out with the flapper and the pocket flask. Recently however, this once-popular hobby has been revived to a certain extent in the form of the activities of the "hot-rodders." A hot rod is an automobile practically rebuilt by an amateur mechanic with the intention of making it a speedster. Usually a conventional chassis and motor of a given vintage is pooled over by the enthusiast. When he is done, after shaving the head, changing the gears, modifying the manifold and the carburetor, altering the springing, he has a vehicle which will do well over a hundred miles per hour. These hobbyists conduct elaborate races with recording devices, they maintain huge clubs, have publications devoted to them and deal with manufacturers who supply them with the peculiar parts they need. The hobby is spreading rapidly and the variations upon it are enormous.

One fan will be interested in economy, another in speed, another in appearance. The result is that these cars look like nothing else ever designed.

But as always in amateur activity, there is more to this than simply fun. Such toying-with, such experimenting, leads to a lot of accumulated information which is of value even to automotive engineers. In fact, some engineers are such hobbyists! Some petroleum engineers in Illinois have organized a club, the object of which is to get the greatest mileage from a given quantity of gasoline, regardless of what is done to the vehicle.

Activities like these will show their value in any future difficulties the country gets into. Just as so many hobbyists have contributed in great measure to the strength of this country in wartime through their peacetime work, so will these new hobbyists add to the wealth of strength we possess. Goose the hot rods, boys, let's take off!

* * *

GOING UP!

By LESLIE PHELPS

IT HAS just been announced from White Sands, New Mexico, the Army's testing and proving ground for V-2's that the highest of all altitude records has been attained! And the method of attainment is one we've been waiting to hear about for a long time—the two-step rocket!

According to the announcement, a two-stage or two-step rocket as it is more commonly called, was sent to a height of two hundred and fifty miles! To all intents and purposes this was truly an extra-terrestrial jaunt much better than the previous record of the single German V-2's blast of about a hundred and twenty-five miles.

The technique used in this new flight was not in itself new. It has been proposed by a host of rocket experimenters and theorizers. Since the ejection velocities of conventional fuels are limited, why not, ask

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these technicians, construct the rocket in two or more stages, so that the first rocket fires its "baby" when it has reached the height of its trajectory? And this is exactly what has been done.

Into a modified German V-2, an American-designed rocket, the "Wac Corporal" a slim needle-like projectile of lesser capabilities was fitted. When the two together were fired, the V-2 alone provided the propulsive power carrying the "Wac Corporal" as a kangeroo carries its baby. When the V-2 attained its maximum et took off not only from a height of better twenty miles, a pre-designed mechanism fired the smaller rocket, the "Wac Corporal." And it took off for parts unknown with enthusiasm.

The clever part of this is, of course, that the V-2 was already traveling about three thousand miles an hour when the smaller rocket was launched. Thus the smaller rocket took off not only from a height of better than a hundred miles and with less gravity to work against, but also with an *initial* velocity of three thousand miles per hour!

Consequently the velocity it built up added to the V-2's gave a total velocity of close to five thousand miles per hour! Oh, Luna, here we come!

This little announcement is the second one in the last few years to make such a big splash. The first was the V-2 itself. In not so many more years we're going to hear of other rockets, perhaps step-rockets too, which rise to greater heights. Then one day there'll be the calm announcement to the public to watch the surface of the moon with any telescopes it may have.

For by then the Army will have launched a flare-carrying rocket destined to bombard our satellite and to show that Man is carrying out his destiny. After that will come the guided, and later manned rockets Interplanetary space is about to be conquered. Every person alive today should feel a certain sense of great events. We are going to usher in the era of interplanetary rocket flight. While it is possible that such things are still ten or twenty or even fifty years away—it would not be safe to bet on it!

Science can't be stopped. Man has a rendezvous with Fate—a rendezvous far from this planet—and science is going to see that he keeps it if it kills him!

HAND OF GLORY

By JUNE LURIE

THERE IS AN interesting type of homoeopathic magic that makes use of the dead or something connected with the dead to control the victim. Just as the dead are deaf, dumb, and blind, so can you make a person deaf, dumb, and blind by using a dead person's bones or some infected article.

It is a custom among the Galelareese when a young man goes courting, that he takes with him some dirt that he shovels off the graveyard. This he sprinkles on the roof directly over the bedroom of his sweetheart's parents. He believes this will keep them from awaking while he talks to his girl. Burglars in many lands have found this type of magic very satisfactory. They simply sprinkle dirt from a grave all around the house that they intend to break into, causing all those inside to fall into a deep sleep. The Slavonic house-breakers would throw a dead man's bones over the house, at the same time saying, "As this bone may waken, so may these people waken." After that charm has been cast, not one soul in the house is able to keep his eyes open. Ashes from funeral pyres are also used to put victims to sleep. The Ruthenian burglars would go a step further and remove the marrow from a human shin bone and pour tallow into the cavity. This they would ignite and carry around the house like a torch, which would cause the residents to go into a death-like sleep. The Ruthenians seemed rather arty in their methods. Another trick was to carve a flute out of a human leg bone and play notes on it. All those within hearing distance were overcome with drowsiness. Mexican Indian burglars would steal the left fore-arm of a woman who had died giving birth to her first child. With it, they beat the ground all around the house that they had designed to plunder. This was meant to cause all the people inside to become motionless and speechless, even though they could hear and see everything that was going on.

In some parts of Europe the hand of Glory was thought to be very effective. It was the pickled hand of a man who had been hanged. Sometime candles were made of the hat of a person who had been hanged, and placed in the Hand of Glory. This was sure to make the burglar's victims helpless. Sometimes the fingers were ignited, and if one refused to burn, it was a sign that someone in the house was still awake. It seems that there was no limit to the early beliefs in the power of a human hand. Some tribes felt that the candle should be made of the finger of a new-born child. In the seventeenth century, robbers first used to kill pregnant women to get the hand of an unborn child. The tiny fingers were ignited like candles and carried into the house with the robber, thus throwing everyone into a trance.

* * *

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The MAGIC of JOE WILKS

By Robert Moore Williams

Joe Wilks knew the doc had a way of fixing him so that he could control a dice game—but was there anyone to control Joe?

"WE WANT to talk to you, doc."

Hearing the voice, Professor Richard Aldrich looked hastily up from the work sheets on his desk. The door of his office was open. Standing just inside the doorway were a man and a woman. The flashily dressed man, with his hat pulled low over his eyes, was regarding Aldrich warily. The woman was watching him with the intentness of a hungry cat standing guard over a hole known to be occupied by a particularly fat mouse.

Aldrich was startled. He hadn't heard the door open and he wasn't accustomed to receiving visitors at ten o'clock at night. He looked them over. The man was dressed in a checked suit, the woman in a skin-tight dress. The man had his right hand in his coat pocket. "What do you want?" he said.

"We want to talk to you," the woman said.

"Yeah," the man added. "We read in the papers how you—"

"Shut up, Joe," the woman said. She moved across the laboratory office with a ball-bearing hip motion that Aldrich watched with awed fascination. Having lived a cloistered life as a college professor he had never met a woman like this one, who walked with her hips. The women in his social circles thought that hips were only used to hold the rest of the body together. This woman had found another use for her hips. Aldrich, fascinated in spite of himself, watched her as she came across the room. "I'm Francis Lavere," she said.

"Huh!" the man grunted. "Born Nellie Fry—"

"You keep your big mouth shut, Joe!" she snapped.

"Sure, Fran. Sure thing," Joe answered hastily.

"We want to talk to you," Fran said to Aldrich, who blinked and took his eyes off of those amazing hips. "All right," he said. "What about?" He watched with awed interest as she placed one of those hips on his desk.

"We think we could get together and make—"

"Ourselves some dough," Joe interrupted. He had moved into the room and was standing just across the desk from Aldrich.

"Dough?" Aldrich said. He had to

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A shout of laughter left Joe's throat as the dice rolled down the table and a seven showed . . .

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stop and think before he remembered what the word meant.

"Mazuma, the green stuff," Joe interpreted for him. "Money."

"I see," Aldrich nodded. "Yes, I have heard about it. A university professor, however, never sees much of it." He sighed at the thought of the badly needed laboratory equipment he could buy if he only had the money for it. "I'm afraid I don't understand how I can help you make any money," he added.

The woman eyed him, the expression on her face indicating there was something she didn't understand either—how he could be as simple as he seemed to be. "Your name is Richard Aldrich?" she said, as if the thought had suddenly occurred to her that she might be talking to the wrong man. His nod reassured her. "Then you're the man—"

"Who learned how to make dice behave," Joe happily finished for her. He took a newspaper clipping from his pocket. "Right here it says you're the man. It's got your name here. Al—Aldrich!" he finished triumphantly.

At the sight of the clipping, the situation was instantly clear to Professor Aldrich. Silently he cursed all feature story writers, for mishandling the truth. He also cursed himself, for being a big enough damned fool to talk to a writer. And he recognized Joe and Fran for what they were, a small-time gambler and his woman. They had read a newspaper story about him, and believing it, had come to talk to him.

THE STORY was about a series of experiments which Aldrich was conducting in attempting to explore the psi ability of the human mind. To Aldrich, this was the most important piece of research ever attempted by the human race. He had often tried to think of something equally important, such as the discovery of fire, the invention of the bow, the steam engine, gun powder, electricity, nuclear energy. All these things were important but compared to the isolation and control of the psi ability, they were—nothing but gadgets. The psi ability included telepathy, the contact of mind with mind, clairvoyance, the ability of the mind to reach out and grasp a fact that no one knew—such as the identity of an unknown card sealed in an envelope, precognition, in which the mind reached forward and grasped a fact as yet hidden in the stream of time, and finally, psychokinetics, in which the mind, reaching out through some mysterious medium, in some unknown manner seemed to exercise control over matter as represented by the fall of dice. Telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinetics were all different facets, different manifestations of the same power—the psi ability.

Professor Aldrich had been exploring one facet of that ability—psychokinetics, the effect, if any, of the mind on the fall of dice. Other research men had attempted the same experiments. He, and they, had thought they had discovered statistical proof that the psi ability actually existed. Interviewed by one of the local newspapermen, he had told his results. Publication of the story had gotten him some gentle kidding from his colleagues. Now it was getting him a visit from a gambler and his woman. Aldrich sighed. "I'm the man who was written up in the feature story all right." He shook his head. "But I fail to see how my experiments could make money for anybody."

"That's easy," Joe said. "We know a big game. You learn us how to roll the dice the way we want to roll 'em—and we'll break the bank." A ragged

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grin covered Joe's rat-like face and he licked his lips, in anticipation of the wealth that soon would be his.

"And that's only one game!" the woman spoke. She had begun to breathe rapidly, a flush had covered her face, and she was so excited she couldn't keep her hip on Aldrich's desk. "There's lots of games in this country. Big games, where they use thousand dollar bills instead of chips. Joe and me'll make all of them! We'll clean up a fortune."

"And you'll get your cut, doc," Joe hastily added. "We'll cut you in share and share alike. We'll split the take three ways, one for me, one for Fran, and one for you. All you've got to do is put the charm on me."

"That's generous of you," Aldrich said. He was both shocked and surprised. The things the public thought a scientist could do! Here this little rat of a gambler thought he could wave some kind of a magic wand over him, after which he would go out and make a killing shooting craps! The naive credulity of the human mind always amazed him. "However, I am afraid you have made a mistake."

"A MISTAKE?" They spoke together. They watched him with the alert nervousness of two bandits holding up a bank teller at the point of a gun. He could see them trying to think where they had made this mistake. He could see them decide they hadn't made one. Joe's face hardened. "You mean you won't do it?" Joe said. His voice took on a note of grimness.

"I mean I can't do it," Aldrich gently corrected. "I'm sorry this happened. I was a damned fool for talking to that reporter. He was a damned fool for writing that article the way he did."

He saw frustration on their faces. He knew they had come to him in good faith, to ask him to do them a favor. They couldn't understand why he wouldn't do it. Wouldn't he get his share of the profits? What more did he want? "It is not possible to do what you ask," he said.

He saw the doubt on their faces change to suspicion. He began to be suspicious himself—that *he* was the one who had made a mistake. "I'm sorry," he said. "You don't understand the nature of the experiments we have been making here. We are trying first of all to determine if the psi ability exists. We think we have determined that it does. Now we are trying to study it, to determine the conditions under which it operates, to learn its laws. It is a task that will take a dozen lifetimes." He sighed again, thinking of the difficulty of that task. The dream of his life was to add just one known factor, to discover just one certain law under which the psi ability operated. If he could do that, he would die happy.

"The paper said you had proved that some people could make the dice roll the way they wanted 'em to roll," Joe spoke.

Aldrich nodded. "Some people. But they have no control of the ability, they don't even know when they are using it. It comes, it goes. One day it works, the next day it doesn't. All we have as proof is a statistical result—"

Joe's face hardened. "Don't give me none of that stuff, doc," he said. "Who do you think you're talking to—a kid? Fix it so I can roll them dice—or else."

"Or else what?" Aldrich demanded. He was a little angry. Just because the Lord had chosen to populate the earth with fools, was no reason why he should be forced to tolerate two of the sadder specimens.

"Or else this!" Joe said. From his coat pocket he produced a flat little

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weapon—a gun.

ALDRICH had seen pictures of guns but he had never seen an actual, real, live automatic pistol. He had not known there could be such a thing as a *live* pistol but after taking one look at this one, he could see that it was alive. No inanimate fabrication of simple metal could look so dangerous and so deadly, could glint with such an evil blueness, unless it was alive. He was aware of tension tightening all over him. Joe's face was hard, as if he meant every word the gun implied. Aldrich glanced sideways at the woman and was shocked to see that her face was harder even than Joe's. Fran was exhibiting a characteristic that every big-game hunter knows and that every male except an unmarried college professor, lost in the routine of classroom and laboratory knows—that the female is deadlier than the male.

"This—" he spluttered. "This is going too far."

"We'll go a lot farther," Fran said. "Unless you do what we want you to." Her nostrils were pinched together, her face taut with the intensity of the moment.

"But what you ask is impossible!"

"It said in the paper you could do it," Fran said. "So you do it."

"Just do it, doc," Joe said. "Don't give us no arguments, not if you want to stay healthy."

It was in the paper, so it had to be true! He recognized the line of reasoning. Anything printed in the paper had to be true. He spread his hands, a helpless gesture. "But—"

Joe slapped him across the side of the face with the gun, a jolting blow that jarred and scared him. His fingers went to his cheek, came away bloody. He stared at the smear of red. This was physical violence. Nothing in his background had prepared him to face violence. He was a dreamer, a careful, painstaking workman, a thorough student, he possessed a finely poised, brilliant mind, but he was not a man of action.

"Joe ain't started yet," Fran said.

"You will get into trouble for this," Aldrich answered.

"We're taking that chance," she said. "It's worth it."

"We have a night watchman here. He is certain to see you and to call the police."

"The night watch is tied up and stuffed in a closet," Joe said. "You didn't think we'd leave him loose, did you?"

He thought of the pathetic trust he and the other members of the faculty had put in that night watchman, how the knowledge that he was around looking after things gave them a feeling of security, a feeling that he now realized had been badly misplaced. A couple of smart crooks had taken care of the night watchman with no trouble whatsoever. He began to have a higher opinion of the mental ability of Joe and Fran. In their field, they were accomplished operators.

Aldrich smiled a lopsided grin. "It looks as if I am caught on the horns of a dilemma."

"Come again," Joe said. "I don't get it."

"Quit stalling," Fran said, impatiently. "Quit stalling and trot out the machine you use to fix people up so they can roll sevens."

"The what?" Aldrich said, perplexed.

"The machine you use," Fran answered. "You have to use some kind of a machine, don't you?"

Aldrich sighed—with relief. Modern man is distinguished by an almost pathetic belief in machines. The bigger they are, the more they shine,

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the more flashing lights they have on them, the better the average man likes them—and the more he believes in them. A fortune waits for the man who can design a more elaborate juke box!

Joe and Fran were no exception. They thought he had a machine hidden somewhere. It was a belief in which he could oblige them. At the same time, he could get rid of them, from his viewpoint a consummation devoutly to be wished.

IN THE NEXT room was an electroencephalograph used in measuring the minute electrical currents known to flow within the human brain. He had borrowed this gadget from the medical department and had used it in an effort to determine if there was any detectable variation in brain current that fluctuated with the functioning of the psi ability, in other words, did the brain radiate a psi wave? If the brain did radiate such a wave, the electroencephalograph had failed to detect the radiation. The experiment had been a complete failure. But the machine was still in the next room awaiting return to the proper department.

"I don't have any choice," Aldrich said. "Come with me and I'll divulge the secret." He rose from his chair.

Varying degrees of satisfaction showed on the faces of Joe and Fran.

"But remember," he added. "I get a third."

"Absolutely, doc," Joe fervidly promised. "Absolutely."

On Joe's face the look of satisfaction increased. All along he had known the professor was stalling. This demand to be cut in for a third proved it.

This kind of talk, this demand for a cut of a third, was language Joe and Fran understood.

But, the instant they entered the laboratory and Joe got a good look at the electroencephalograph, a new difficulty developed. Joe drew hastily away from the machine. "Hey, doc," he protested.

"What's wrong?" Aldrich questioned.

"That looks like the hot squat, with all them wires and things. I'm not going to let you stick them wires on me."

"But what if he turns the juice into your head," Aldrich argued.

"I ain't goin' to let you do it to me," Joe answered.

Aldrich shrugged. "Very well," he said.

Fran was watching. "Here, give me that gun," she spoke to Joe. The little gambler reluctantly yielded the weapon. "Now let him fix them wires on you," she said.

"But what if he turns the juice into me?" Joe protested.

"If he does, I'll shoot him," Fran promised.

"What good'll that do me?" Joe demanded. "*You* get into the machine and let him stick them wires on you. I'll keep the gun and I'll shoot him if he electrocutes you."

"You big coward," Fran answered. "You big heel. Are you scared of a little old electricity."

"I've knowed some guys who got killed with a little old electricity." Joe pointed out. "Iggy Schultz, Egghead Broker—"

"This ain't no electric chair, you big dope," Fran answered. "This is the machine that teaches you how to roll naturals. Aw, Joe, do it for me."

ALDRICH, watching, was treated to the sight of a woman cozening a man. Francis did everything but sit in Joe's lap, and she tried to do that, no mean trick considering the

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fact that Joe was standing up. She called him her lambie-pie and her sweetie-pig. And Joe yielded, though with reluctance.

"You needn't be afraid," Aldrich told him, maliciously. "You won't even feel it."

Joe gulped. "They tell me you don't feel it in the chair, either."

Aldrich, wishing there was some way to give this little rat-faced gambler a stiff electrical shock, fastened the leads in place. Unfortunately the equipment was carefully designed to prevent shocking the patient.

"Does anything hurt you?" he asked, in a last attempt to shake Joe's nerve.

"Everything hurts me." Joe answered. He was sweating from every pore.

"Do you want to back out?" Aldrich continued, in what he hoped was the tone of voice a warden would use in asking a condemned convict for any last request.

Fran wiggled the gun. "Just get going, doc," she said. "Never mind the questions."

Aldrich connected the last lead. For good measure he hooked in a bell and a flashing light, which had nothing to do with the functioning of the equipment but would serve to make the demonstration more effective. Then he turned on the current. The encephalograph ticked softly, the bell began to ring, and the light began to flash. Joe grabbed the arms of the chair. Sweat boiled out of him in yellow bubbles and he held on the chair as if he never expected to rise from it. Aldrich, watching, was impressed in spite of himself. Joe was scared yellow but there was a streak of gameness in him. Aldrich turned off the equipment and detached the leads. Joe rose from the chair. "I'll never go through with this again if I live a thousand years," he said.

"Is he all fixed?" Fran asked anxiously.

"He's fixed and you can go," Aldrich answered. "But remember, I'm expecting my third."

So far as he was concerned, this was the end of an irritating but interesting experience.

"Not so fast," Fran answered. "We got to check first."

"Check what? Check how?" Aldrich answered, confused.

"Check to see that you ain't slipped an extra joker into the deck, professor Get out your dice, Joe, and roll a couple of naturals, so we can be sure the prof ain't slipped over a fast one."

"Uh!" Aldrich said.

Joe, grinning, took a pair of dice from his pocket. He rolled them between his palms, breathed on them, got down on his knees and sent them rattling across the floor. "Seven, dice, seven!" he crooned. His voice was a prayer.

The dice bounced from the baseboard, came to a halt. Joe leaned forward and looked at them, then looked up at the horrified Aldrich. The look on his face was pure ecstacy. "Seven it is," he said.

Fran squealed with delight. "You're wonderful, doc!" she whispered.

Joe nodded his approval. "You sure deliver the goods."

"Uh!" Aldrich said. Joe had asked for seven and seven had come up. To the psychologist's mind, there was only one explanation—accident.

"I'll roll another one, to make sure," Joe said.

"Uh—no!" Aldrich said hastily. He wanted no second chance. Right this instant, his reputation was made with this unsavory pair. All he wanted was to get them on their way before they discovered he had tricked them. "You

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will use up the power," he quickly improvised. "Every time you roll a number you use up some of the power. Don't waste it, Joe. You may need it."

Joe, rattling the dice like a child playing with a new toy, disagreed. "Just one more, doc," he begged.

"You do what the doc says," Fran told him.

"Now that's what I call good sense," Aldrich said with false admiration. "I've done my part. Now it's up to you two to do yours."

"We're starting right now to do our part," Fran answered. "I know a game we'll bust wide open. And—" Her eyes fastened on Aldrich with fearful intensity, "—you're coming with us."

"Coming with you?" Aldrich faltered.

Fran still had the gun. She displayed it again. "Just in case, doc." she said.

"But—" Aldrich tried to protest.

"No 'buts'," Fran answered. "You're coming with us."

THEY TOOK the dazed psychologist outside and put him between them in the front seat of a car and drove to an establishment they called Lou's place. Before they were admitted to Lou's Place, they were carefully inspected by a pair of eyes which stared at them through a peephole. Joe and Fran passed muster instantly. Aldrich gathered that they were known to the eyes, but they had to vouch for him.

"I don't know these people," Aldrich quickly protested to the man behind the peephole. "I never saw them before."

"Sure he knows us," Fran told the eyes. "He's just a little tight, is all. He's with us. Come on, doc." She hooked her hand through his arm and kicked him on the leg. "You want me to put a slug in you?" she whispered to him.

"Okay," a voice growled behind the peephole. The door opened. Aldrich was led into a large room filled with men and muted voices and a strange clatter which he—from his experiments with that facet of the psi ability known as psychokinetics—recognized as the rattle of dice. The sound came from the center of a circle of men around a big table. Fran, Joe, and the reluctant Aldrich elbowed their way to a place beside the table, which was covered with more money than the psychologist had ever seen in his life. It was stacked in piles on the far side of the table and each man around the table seemed to have a handful of ten, twenty, or fifty dollar bills. Behind the table were two men who seemed to be running the show. Except for the rattle of the dice in the cup, and the hushed breathing of men who seemed awed by the imminence of a miracle, the room was silent.

"Eight is the point," one of the men behind the table droned. Aldrich assumed these two men were croupiers, or house men.

"Eighter from Decatur," the man with the dice cup begged. He spun the cubes out of the cup, bouncing them across the felt-covered table and against the protective railing around it. They came to rest.

"Nine," the house man said.

"Twenty he does," a fat man whispered.

"Covered," the houseman said.

"Twenty he does what?" Aldrich asked, fascinated in spite of himself. He didn't understand. Neither Fran nor Joe bothered to explain the intricacies of the "come bet." The eight-shooter rolled again. "Seven," the croupier said. Money changed hands around the table and the dice

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cup was passed on to the next man.

Joe was wedging himself into a position beside the table. There was sweat on his face but rapt ecstacy in his eyes as he waited his turn with the dice. Fingering a fifty-dollar bill, Joe was licking his lips.

"I think I had better be going," Aldrich said.

Fran tightened her grip on his arm. "Stick around, doc," she said. Since he would have had to break her arm to get away, he stuck around, although he was suffering torture in imagining what was going to happen when Joe got the dice and bet that fifty-dollar bill. He began to think up explanations for failure, alibis for that dreadful moment. "I can say the power leaks off," he thought. And wondered if that would be convincing.

He had the suspicion that this, or something else, had better be convincing. The side of his face where Joe had slapped him with the gun was still raw. What would Joe do when he lost the fifty dollars? Worse, what would Fran do?

Aldrich did not doubt that Joe would lose the money. And—Joe had the dice cup. His turn had come.

Tenderly Joe laid the fifty-dollar bill on the line.

"All of it?" the houseman asked. He apparently knew Joe and the usual limits of Joe's bets, which did not extend to risking half a C on the roll of a pair of dice.

"All of it," Joe answered firmly. "I feel lucky tonight." He rattled the dice in the cup. Aldrich held his breath. Sweat glistening on his face, Joe spun the dice across the table. "Seven!" he breathed rapturously.

THE DICE came to rest. The houseman scanned them. "Seven it is," he droned. He laid another fifty-dollar bill beside the one Joe had put on the table.

Joe had won.

A dazed expression on his face, Joe looked at the hundred dollars lying there in front of him. It was his money, he could take it, he could shoot any part of it, or all. "Let it ride," he said. Licking his lips, he picked up the dice cup.

The houseman was willing to take the bet. Every night some small-time big shot came in with a five or a ten-dollar bill and tried to let it ride—and double itself each time he passed—for as many rolls of the dice as he felt his nerves could stand If you started with a five-dollar bill, and passed ten times in a row, you could walk out with a little more than five thousand dollars in winnings. Aldrich hastily performed geometrical progression in his mind. If Joe could pass ten times, he would win a little more than fifty thousand dollars!"

The sum bewildered Aldrich. Here was a fortune almost beyond computation.

Of course there was a catch to it, the catch being that no one was likely to pass ten times in a row. Aldrich tried to figure the odds against such a performance with the dice. The figures were astronomical, too big to be calculated in the head.

Aldrich knew the odds; the houseman knew them; Joe probably knew them too. But Joe believed he had found a way to beat those odds. And Joe had the dice and was rolling again. "Seven," he prayed.

"Seven it is," the houseman said. He laid another hundred dollars on the table, making two hundred dollars in all.

"Shoot the wad," Joe said.

Three passes later, he had better than sixteen hundred dollars on the table in front of him and was reach-

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ing for the dice to shoot again.

"Let me look at them dice," the houseman spoke.

Joe cheerfully handed them over. "They're yours," he said.

No biologist ever gave more care and attention to a new and exciting bug than the houseman gave to those dice. The big room was completely silent. All around him, Aldrich could hear men holding their breath. Beside him, he thought Fran was going to faint from excitement. The pile of money in front of Joe was not yet in the mink coat class but it was moving rapidly in that direction.

The houseman finished his examination of the dice. "They look all right," he admitted, grudgingly. "But we'll just put in a new pair, to be sure." He reached down behind the table, brought out a pair of cellophane-wrapped cubes. Removing the wrappings, he put them into the cup with his own hands, not trusting Joe to touch them. "Shoot," he said to Joe.

Grinning, Joe spun the dice from the cup. "Eleven!" he breathed rapturously.

"Eleven it is," the houseman said. Looking bewildered and confused, he shoved great stacks of money in front of Joe.

Fran forgot all about Aldrich. This was her man. And look at all that money in front of him. "Joe!" she screamed.

Aldrich, released, quietly headed for the door. Deep in his heart he knew that Joe was going to keep on shooting. He knew also that Joe was going to lose—unless Joe actually had psi ability. Aldrich didn't consider that possibility. But he knew he didn't want to be around when Joe lost and the houseman reclaimed all the money on the table. Especially he didn't want to be around Fran.

Aldrich headed for the door. As a result, he didn't see what happened next.

MEN CROWDED closely around the table as Joe made the pass. There was complete silence As nonchalantly as if he was shooting dimes, Joe repeated, "Shoot the wad." And reached for the dice cup.

The dazed houseman shook his head. "Lou will have to okay this one himself," he said. "No, sir, I ain't covering this bet unless Lou okays it. Frank, go get Lou," he said to the second man behind the table. Nodding, the second man moved off. He returned promptly with the owner of the gambling house.

Lou was a short man, well dressed, with an expressionless face, and the deep inner conviction that the world owed him a living, which he collected by means of favoring percentages at his dice table. He was accustomed to squawks and kicks from dissatisfied customers and he kept a squad of strong-arm men to deal with such nuisances.

When he reached the table he found he didn't have a squawker to kick out. Instead this customer was extremely satisfied. All the customer wanted to do was to shoot again.

"One more roll, Lou," Joe begged. "Just one more roll, huh, Lou?" He shook the empty dice cup aggressively.

Lou looked at Joe. He knew Joe very well—as a two-bit shooter. He was prepared to okay any shot Joe wanted to make. But then he looked at the amount of money on the table. Sweat popped out all over him. That was his money there. His money! Money was only slightly less important than his right arm. "What the hell's going on here?" he demanded.

The dazed houseman tried to ex-

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plain. "Joe came in and started shooting. He ain't fell off yet and he's still got the dice. He wants to shoot the wad."

"I see," Lou said. The situation was completely clear to him. Joe had had a lucky streak. It happened that way, sometimes. But luck always changed. That was the way the dice operated. They went along with you for a few rolls, then they turned against you.

If Lou covered the bet and let the game continue, Joe would be certain to lose. If Lou stopped the game, Joe would walk out—with thousands of dollars of Lou's money, a contingency that Lou considered with horror.

"Throw in some new dice," Lou ordered. "And let him shoot. The house will cover."

The houseman obeyed. Joe rattled the dice in the cup. It was the only sound in the big room. "Seven!" Joe prayed.

The dice skipped across the green cloth, rattled against the sideboards and came to rest. The houseman bent over to read them. "Seven it is," he croaked.

"My God!" Lou choked. "I'm sixty-four hundred dollars in the red!"

"Shoot the wad again?" Joe said.

"Shoot!" the gambler screamed. He was in too far to back out now. He *had* to go on until Joe fell off. Hardly able to breathe, Lou waited for the next roll of the dice.

"Eleven!" Joe whispered.

"Eleven it is," the houseman said.

"Twelve thousand dollars!" Lou choked. "Hold the dice." He shoved Joe away from the table. "Something's wrong here. You're calling your points and making them. The dice don't do that."

Hot silence filled the room. "Every time he's called a natural and every time he's made the point he wanted," the houseman husked, in that hot silence.

IN RAPT ecstasy at the way the dice were falling, Joe had not realized he was making a mistake in calling his point each time in advance. His second mistake had been in rolling a sure winner each time he got the dice. He realized now what he had done. "Well," he said uneasily. "They're your dice and it's your cup and it's your table..."

"And my money too," Lou said. "Don't forget that part of it."

"My money," Joe denied. "Everybody here saw me win it. Don't you try to say I didn't win it." From the table he began to scoop up stacks of bills, which he hastily thrust into his pockets.

"Joe!" Fran whispered, ecstatically. She was certainly in the mink coat class now.

"What the hell!" Lou said angrily, then hesitated. He was in a spot and he knew it. While he suspected that something was wrong here, he didn't know what it was. He and his strong-arm boys could take the money away from Joe but he had his reputation to consider. Too many customers were watching to allow him to welch on a winner. If he shook Joe loose from the money, the story would be all over town by morning. Tomorrow night he wouldn't have a single crap shooter in his place. In the meantime, while he hesitated, Joe was stuffing himself with enough hay to choke a horse.

Lou was suspicious, he was angrily certain he had been taken. The question was how. As Joe had pointed out, the game had been with his dice, on his table, and with his men watching. It was impossible to throw crooked dice out of a cup. Whole generations of crap shooters could be called on to testify on this point. Then how had it been done?

The doorman entered. He was push-

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ing a protesting man ahead of him. "Boss," the doorman called out. "Boss, this guy was trying to sneak out, like he had grabbed himself a piece of change and was running off with it. I thought you might want to see him."

The doorman pushed the man forward. "He came in with Joe and Fran," he said.

"I never saw them before in my life," the man yelled. "Let me out of here."

The man was Aldrich. His plan for a quick, quiet escape had been thwarted by the alert doorman. He didn't know what had happened here and didn't care. All he wanted was to get out.

Lou looked at him. To his horror, he saw dawning recognition on Lou's face. "I know who you are," he heard Lou say. "I saw your picture in the paper. You're the man who claimed to have found a way to make the dice behave."

As a gambling house owner, Lou had been greatly interested in the feature story about the university professor who had been conducting research with dice.

"You've got the wrong man," Aldrich said.

Lou seemed not to hear him. "And you came in with Joe and Fran," Lou said. His tone of voice was that of a man who has put two and two together and has come up with a dead certain four.

"I don't know who you're talking about," Aldrich protested. Whatever had happened here, he was an innocent victim.

"I think you do know, professor," Lou answered. The gambler moved toward him, took him by the arm. "Come into my office, professor. I want to talk to you."

The protesting Aldrich found himself being violently shoved along. He tried to resist but Lou had a grip of iron. Over his shoulder, Lou called out. "Grab Joe and Fran, boys, and take 'em into the back room. I'll be with you as soon as I escort the professor into my office."

Aldrich heard Fran scream, caught a glimpse of her trying to use the gun. He had the confused impression that the gambling house patrons, startled by the sight of the gun, were suddenly heading en masse for the exits. He also saw Joe and Fran go down under what looked like a tidal wave of bouncers. Then he found himself thrust through a door. A split second later, an evil-faced thug also came through the door—to stand guard over him until Lou returned.

With what dignity he could muster, Aldrich tried to compose himself to await the next turn of events.

BY ALDRICH'S watch, Lou was gone less than twenty minutes. When the gambler entered the office, he was, surprisingly, in a very good humor. His face was wreathed in smiles but underneath Aldrich thought he detected a current of uneasiness, as if Lou felt the immediate situation was under control but was vaguely worried about the long-term developments. Lou had his hands full of money. He grinned at Aldrich and placed the money in a big steel safe back of his desk, then turned to the psychologist.

"Joe gave me back my money," he said. "They also told me the whole story."

Aldrich blinked. He hadn't the vaguest notion of the subject Lou was discussing. "What story?" he said.

Lou smiled. "I want in on it," he said.

"In on what?" Aldrich questioned.

Lou lost none of his good humor. "I'd deny it too, and act innocent as all hell, if I had that machine you've

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got. How do you work that machine, Mr. Aldrich, to fix up Joe so he could call any point he wanted—and make it?"

"So that's what you want in on!" Aldrich said, "I mean—there is no such machine."

Lou laughed. "Bring Joe and Fran in here," he said, to the thug who had stood guard over Aldrich.

They were brought into the office. Joe had a black eye and his collar was torn. He looked thoroughly miserable and unhappy. Fran's dress was torn and her face looked as if she had been crying gallons of scalding tears. "You...you let us out of here," she said to Lou.

The gambler ignored her. "Joe, Doc Aldrich here says he don't have a machine. I want you to show him the same trick you showed me."

"Okay, Lou," Joe said. "Give me some dice."

Rolling the dice on the thick rug, bouncing them off the baseboard each time, calling each point in advance, he ran in sequence every point on the dice from two to twelve.

"Snake eyes to box cars," Lou said. "Now doc..."

But Aldrich wasn't listening. With the glassy-eyed rapt stare of a mystic seeing a vision of another world, he was staring at Joe. In his mind was only one thought—Joe had the psi ability under control. Out of what Aldrich knew was hokum, out of a machine used to read tiny electrical currents flowing in the mind, out of a flashing light and an electric bell, out of dazed fear and pathetic belief, out of sweat and shaky nerves, had come control of the psi ability! In his laboratory, unintentionally, in an effort to escape from an embarrassing situation, he had created a miracle. He didn't begin to know how it had happened. No part of it made any sense. But it had happened. Here was Joe proving it had happened. And here, also, was Lou.

In the back of Aldrich's mind there had always been doubt concerning the psi ability. Mathematical analysis said it existed but what if the arithmetic was wrong? How could you be sure? The ability was erratic, intangible, it came, it went, a wild talent operating completely beyond the control of the conscious mind.

Aldrich had never found a subject who had the psi ability under control. Occasionally subjects seemed to have flashes of control, for a few minutes or a few seconds. Then the control was gone—before it could be studied. Aldrich had torn his hair over this fact—and over the fringe questions that the psi ability brought into existence.

If the mind could control the fall of the dice, if the mind could reach forward and grasp the substance of things to come, what else could the mind do?

THIS WAS A question that had haunted Aldrich in the darkness of the deep night, that disturbed his dreams, that sent him mooning around the campus by day, a professor pondering the stuff of dreams. The psi ability was a signboard pointing the way into the unknown. Columbus, Maxwell, Einstein—these men had all followed signboards leading beyond the boundaries of known things with results that had made history. What results might be achieved by the man who exploded the psi ability?

What was back of this ability? This was the question. Hamlet pondered a lesser puzzle. The trail that started in a deck of cards, in the controlled fall of a pair of ivory cubes, led outward to what vast horizon?

For years, Aldrich had pondered the vastness of that horizon, feeling always that just beyond the grasp of

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the understanding, something important waited. Deep in his heart he knew it was the vastness of this unknown horizon that had inspired him for years to carry on the patient, mind-wrenching toil necessary even to begin to investigate extrasensory perception. He hadn't expected to learn everything about the psi ability—the work of centuries would be necessary for that—but he knew he would die happy if he could add just one fragment of demonstrable fact to the oceans of speculation on the subject. If the unknown was as vast as the sands of all the seashores on earth, his prayer had always been, "Dear God, let me understand just one grain of sand. Let me have just one grain of sand, one known fact. You have so many grains of sand—give me just one."

This, from Aldrich, who was not a religious man! "Let me be sure, just once, that the fall of the dice has not been the result of chance, that the call of the hidden card has not been accident, that the mind actually does reach out into the future! Let me be able to throw all my statistics out of the window and be certain just once!"

It was an echo of an old request. Probably the first man who tried to control fire—and got himself burned by the dangerous stuff—made the same request of the gods he knew. "Great Whoozis, teach me how this yellow stuff works!" Maybe the answer went, "Just keep on working, little man, and you will solve the secret." Maybe there was no answer. But the man seeking control of fire kept on working anyhow, knowing there was an answer somewhere, and knowing, by Whoozis! that he intended to have it!

Aldrich had not hoped to have the whole secret. He was a humble man, he didn't ask for too much. Just one grain of sand!

Now and here, in the over-furnished office of a gambling house, with a thick carpet on the floor, sporting pictures on the wall, and indirect lighting springing from concealed niches, in the company of a woman with ball-bearing hips, in the presence of a gambling house owner whose suave exterior did not conceal the deadliness within him, an over-dressed small-time gambler named Joe had the psi ability under conscious control!

Fate sure went to a lot of trouble to pick this one out of the grab-bag! Aldrich thought. There was bitterness in him. And such eagerness as he had never known.

Joe, finishing rolling box-cars on the dice, stood up, a lopsided scared grin on his face. The black eyes sought Lou.

"You and Fran go on back," Lou said. "But—hang around." He glanced at the men with them. They nodded. It was their job to make certain that Joe and Fran hung around. They exited through a side door under the watchful eye of a hard-faced thug who looked as if he knew exactly what to do in case they tried to escape.

"Sit down, professor," Lou said. "Drink?"

"No, thanks," Aldrich said.

"Cigar?"

"No."

LOU SHRUGGED. He had tried to be hospitable. He sat down in the swivel chair behind the desk. He seemed affable, the eternal smile did not leave his face, but under the mask of friendliness Aldrich sensed uneasiness—and danger.

"It looks like you have put me out of business," Lou said.

"I don't understand you."

Lou shrugged. "Nobody can bank a crap game any more, not with you on the loose. Any night somebody

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might come in here and break the bank, somebody who wasn't as big a fool as Joe. The next man might be smart enough to fall off a few times, to miss now and then with the dice, to lose a little. Maybe he would only nick me for a little bit, knowing I would think he had just been lucky. But the point is—I'd never know whether he had just been lucky, or whether you had worked on him. And while I was trying to make up my mind, he'd nick me for my bankroll."

Lou's face said he didn't like it. He had a nice thing here, taking suckers for their spare change, running a big-time game for big-time fools. Now his good thing was gone.

"But you are reasoning from a false premise." Aldrich answered. "I can't give the psi ability to any damn fool who asks for it. I didn't give it to Joe. I have no machine."

His voice was hot. What wouldn't he give for such a machine! With it, he would be able to study the psi ability at his leisure, study it fully and completely With such a machine he would have an ocean of sand.

Lou grinned as if he had heard a good joke. "Here we go again."

"But I am telling you that Joe's ability is the result of accident, not of intention—"

Lou lost some of his good humor. "Aw, stuff it, doc. You save that sort of stuff for the birds. You saw Joe roll everything from snake-eyes right up to box cars."

"Listen, you damn fool, I'm not saying that Joe can't do what you say. I'm saying he has the ability as the result of some accidental combination of unknown factors, that I know nothing of how it was done."

Lou frowned. "But how does he do it?"

"I don't know." Aldrich pounded on the desk top. "But Joe believed I could do it, he had faith in me and my mysterious machine. If you believe strongly enough in anything it may turn out to be true. Faith was part of it, fear was another part, his yearning to do something for that woman of his was probably another part, his greed for money was still another factor. Faith and fear and love and greed—these were the factors responsible for the miracle, not the electroencephalograph in my laboratory. The machine only served to impress him, to give him a tangible object that he could see and feel, but the psi ability came out of his own mind and from no other source."

BEHIND the desk, Lou looked impressed. But some lingering shred of doubt remained. "All the same doc, he's got it—"

Bang! went Aldrich's fist on the desk. "And I'm going to find out how he got it, I'm going to find out what it is and how it works. I want Joe For the first time in history we have a chance to study the psi ability under controlled conditions. Joe is there is one of the most important men alive today. I want you to help me convince him to submit to tests, to an exhaustive study—"

"But I kind of figured I could use him," Lou demurred. "After all, he can roll the dice. And there are other games. With him working for me, I can—"

"Make a fortune!" Aldrich finished. "You make me sick at my stomach One of your thugs is in there guarding a man who has control of the rarest and most important ability of the human mind and all you can think of is how to use him to get rich. Damn it man, I won't stand for it! I tell you I won't stand for it."

In his anger, Aldrich was magnificent.

"But Joe's only a two-bit crap-

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shooter," Lou protested "He ain't so important as all that."

"I don't care what you call him!" Aldrich answered. "I don't care if he has warts on the end of his nose. He's a stinking worrisome little gutter rat and I know it and I don't give a damn, he's still one of the most important men alive today."

Lou hesitated, torn between conflicting desires. Aldrich's intensity must have impressed him but in the back of his mind was the lurking knowledge that he could use Joe to clean up. And he had control of Joe. Why should he give up a goose that was going to lay golden eggs?

True, it wouldn't actually cost him anything to give up Joe—if he stood to lose any hard cash, he wouldn't have considered it for a moment—but there was the prospect of future gain, and he hated to give that up. "Doc, I don't know—"

"By God, I know!" Aldrich answered. He broke off. From the next room, where Joe and Fran had been taken, came the sound of a woman's scream.

AT THE SOUND, Lou came instantly to his feet. He jerked open the door.

Joe and Fran were there. So was the hard-faced thug who had been detailed to guard them. The thug, a startled out of his wits expression on his face, had his hands high in the air. A gun, held by Joe, was pointing at the thug. Joe was looking pleased with himself and a little bewildered. His blood-shot eye glinted with a satisfied light. Fran looked plain scared. Hearing the door open, she turned her head and saw Lou.

"It just flew through the air," she gulped.

Aldrich had no idea what had flown through the air. Probably Lou didn't either. But Lou saw the gun. He understood that well enough. He was trying desperately to close the door when Joe saw him. Joe swung the gun to cover him. "You stand still," Joe said. His blood-shot eye measured Lou's coat as if he was deciding just exactly where he was going to put that slug of hot lead.

Lou hastily lifted his hands. His eyes sought the thug, his man who had permitted this to happen. "I had the gun in my pocket," the thug gulped. "I swear it just flew out of my pocket and jumped into Joe's hand."

"So it's your gun?" Lou said. "And you let him get it away from you?"

"Let him?" the thug wailed. "I tell you it just flew from my pocket to his hand!"

"Walk backward into your office," Joe spoke to Lou. "Keep your hands up. And if I was you I wouldn't make no breaks of no kind."

With Fran following him, he backed the astounded gambler and the thug into Lou's office. Aldrich, keeping out of the way, didn't raise his hands. Joe saw that he didn't but didn't seem to care. Hands up or hands down, a college professor was no threat to him. Joe looked around the office. His eyes came to rest on the big safe.

"Open it up," he said.

"By God—"

"Open it," Joe said. He had a gun and the gun gave him command of the situation—he thought.

Lou looked at him. "You go to hell!" Lou said.

"Huh?" Joe was astonished. He fingered the weapon he was holding. Didn't Lou have enough sense to know that this thing was dangerous?

"No two-bit crapshooter is going to hold *me* up!" Lou said. "And don't tell me *you'll* shoot me. You ain't got the guts."

The unhappy look on Joe's face re-

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vealed that Lou was right. "If you try to use that gun, my boys will make you eat it before they're through with you," Lou said. A man didn't become the owner of a gambling house without being rough tough, and a good judge of human nature. Lou wasn't going to be bluffed by a man who didn't have the courage to shoot. He wasn't going to lose money that way. If he let Joe hold him up, his friends would laugh him out of town.

Joe looked stunned. "It's my money," he said, plaintively. "I won it. I want it—" He looked hungrily toward the safe.

"You'll play hell getting it—" Lou's voice went into horrified silence.

Aldrich, watching, choked. Something was happening, he couldn't tell exactly what. His ears caught the suggestion of thin silk rustling and tearing gently, a long slow rip, as if some methodical dressmaker was at work, a dressmaker who scorned to use scissors but tore the fabric instead in strong experienced hands. His eyes caught the flicker of movement so rapid it hardly registered on the retina.

Between Joe and the safe something moved. Aldrich couldn't tell in which direction it was moving or what was in motion. But he could see the money falling around Joe.

IT FELL in a gentle rain of fluttering green and yellow. Popping out of nowhere all around him, it floated gently downward. It piled up on the thick carpet at his feet until it covered his shoes, ten, twenty, fifty, hundred-dollar bills. For the space of one second, maybe for two or three seconds, it continued to fall. Maybe it continued for as long as half a minute. Aldrich had the impression that his time-sense was out of joint somehow, that during the moment when the invisible silk was ripping and the money was falling around Joe, time assumed a new meaning—or no meaning. There was something wrong with time, of this he was certain. When the money stopped falling, Joe's shoes were covered by it.

The room was still. Off in the night a taxi honked. The thug who had guarded Joe made grunting noises in his throat. "I told you the gun just flew through the air. Like this money. Like—see for yourself, Lou."

Lou stood without moving. The red color on his face was fleeing under the pressure of a creeping tide of white. His mouth hung open and he seemed to be choking.

Joe gazed dreamily at the falling money, his eyes went down to the pile of bills covering his shoes. He moved one foot, gently, like a man unexpectedly caught in mud and carefully extricating himself, shook the money from it, then stepped aside. He had not realized what had happened or the significance of it. He was the casual spectator at an interesting event, nothing more. He didn't attempt to pick up the money. He looked at it and stepped away.

Fran acted. She grabbed for the money. Like a hungry man snatching at food, she snatched at the bills.

Aldrich, watching, had the dazed impression of wads of bills vanishing into the front of her dress. When that receptacle was filled she began to shove money down inside the tops of her stockings. Only when her hose were so full that they would not hold another dollar did she look up at Joe.

"You dope—" she wailed. "Help me."

Joe got the idea then. He had been aloof, removed from this situation. Now, with Fran frantically urging him, he began to scoop wads of mon-

(Continued On Page 146)

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(Continued From Page 144)

ey into his pockets. Neither Lou nor Lou's thug tried to stop him. When the last of the money was out of sight, Joe and Fran stood up.

"We're getting out of here, we're getting out of here!" Fran screamed. "Don't you try to stop us." From Joe, she grabbed the gun. "Don't you dare!" The thought of losing the money made her almost hysterical.

Lou might have jumped Joe. He rocked forward on his toes as if he was thinking of it. But when Fran got the gun, Lou stood very still. She would kill a man. "Come on, you dope, let's beat it," she said to Joe. They moved to the door together. Aldrich came to life. "Hey!" he yelled.

They hesitated, looking at him. "What do you want, doc?" Joe said.

Aldrich wanted—a million things. Most of all he wanted to talk to Joe.

"Don't pay any attention to him!" Fran's voice was taut with hysteria.

"But he's the man who fixed me up," Joe protested. Something of gratitude lingered in his heart.

"But we don't need him any more!" Fran screamed. She seemed to lose control of herself. "Get on out of here!" She shoved Joe through the door. When Aldrich protested and tried to follow, she swung the gun to cover him.

"I'll let you have it!" The wild glare of the beast was in her eyes. She meant what she said and Aldrich realized she meant it. He stood very still. He didn't protest. Death looked at him out of Fran's eyes and he knew it. He didn't like the sight. The door slammed shut behind her.

RUNNING footsteps sounded outside, grew fainter. Came the heavy slam of a distant door, then silence. Aldrich wiped sweat from his face and wished there was some way to wipe the sickness from his heart. Joe, who had the psi ability under control, was gone.

In the office was the hot sound of profanity. Lou, swearing, as he spun the dial of the safe. The metal door swung back. Lou looked inside. The safe was empty.

"By God, that money did come out of my safe!" the gambler gasped. "Thirty grand in there and every dime of it gone!"

For a moment Aldrich thought the gambler was going to suffer a stroke of apoplexy. "Al, round up the boys. Tell them to find Joe Wilks for me. Tell them there's an even grand waiting for the one who spots him."

"Yes sir," the thug answered. "But ain't you forgetting—"

"Tell them I don't care if Joe gets hurt. Move!"

"Yes, sir boss." Al left, on the double.

"I'll have that two-bit crapshooter inside of two hours or know the reason why!" Lou grabbed the telephone. Anger was a force boiling out of him like steam out of a boiler.

"You may at that," Aldrich said.

"Huh?"

"You may know the reason why you don't have him!" Aldrich answered. "Aren't you forgetting how he took that money from your safe?"

"Huh?" Some of the anger seemed to boil out of the gambler. He sank down in the swivel chair behind his desk, passed one hand in front of his eyes. He jerked his head around to stare at the safe, as if he was remembering at last that it was made of steel and had not been opened. A shudder passed over him. His gaze came back to Aldrich. "How'd he do that, doc?"

"He violated the laws of nature as we know them," Aldrich answered. "Or he used some higher law of which we know nothing. But don't

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ask me how he got that money out of your safe. I don't know." Inside of him he was aware again of the feeling of unreality as if some part of him was already telling lies about this, denying what his eyes had seen. "I saw that money come out. Something rustled, like silk tearing..."

What had happened here? He didn't know. His guess was that the psi ability had functioned in some totally unknown manner. If the mind could reach forward into time and tell the future sequence of an as yet unshuffled deck of cards, why couldn't the mind reach inside a steel safe? All physical laws said it couldn't be done. Off-setting these laws was the fact that he had seen it happen. "Therefore," he reasoned, "we don't know all the laws."

He turned toward the door, aware only of the tremendous pressure within him. "Ive got to talk to him. I've got to! *Got to!*"

Lou snatched a pistol from the drawer of his desk. "Hold the deal, doc. You ain't going nowhere!"

"But—"

"You ain't going nowhere. For all I know, you and Joe may be working together in this business."

"But I told you we aren't. And I have to talk to him. You don't realize how important this is."

"If he is able to talk when I get through with him, you can have your chance," Lou answered. "And I know how important he is—just as important as thirty grand."

"What the hell is money?" Aldrich shouted. "The man has psi ability."

"He also has thirty grand that happens to belong to me," the gambler answered. "You stick around, doc. We'll get him."

"I hope you know what you're do ing," Aldrich said. In his mind the doubts were as heavy as lead bricks.

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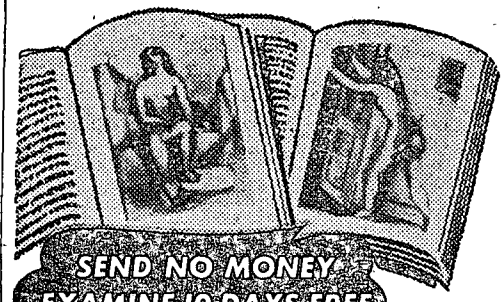

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IT WAS four o'clock in the morning before Joe Wilks was located. A telephone call came through. "Him and the jane just checked in at a dump on twenty-first street."

"Square the night clerk and the house dick," Lou ordered, over the phone. "Keep an eye on the place. Don't let them get out of there."

The gambler flung the telephone back on its cradle. "Come on, doc," he said to Aldrich.

In this dead hour before the dawn the city slept grumpily, like some uneasy monster. Al drove the car. Aldrich and Lou rode in the back seat.

The hotel was an ancient eight-story building. Fifty years before, it had been a stylish place but the tides of time and fashion had brought it down to a fourth rate fly-by-night inhabited by street walkers and small-time crooks. Al stopped the car a block away. Lou looked up at the hotel. In the harsh glow from the streetlights, his face was not a pleasant sight. "That so-and-so had better have my dough," he said "Or else."

Aldrich could guess what the gambler was thinking. He wondered if Joe could detect Lou's thought. Telepathy was one facet of the psi ability. "Remember I want to talk to him," he said.

"After doc, after," Lou answered.

The night clerk was dozing behind the desk when they entered. In an overstuffed chair a man with a nervous face was smoking cigarettes in chain style. Nervous Face got quickly to his feet and came toward them. He looked questioningly at Aldrich, then spoke to Lou. "They're in 814. That's on the front. Here's a key. Use the self-service elevator. The house dick and the clerk are both fixed."

Lou nodded. "You stay here in the lobby," he ordered. Aldrich and Al followed him toward the elevator. They got off on the eighth floor.

The old building was quiet. It had seen a great many strange scenes during the fifty years it had stood here and the sight of three men tip-toeing down a hall did not astonish it. Nothing would astonish this building any more.

Lou stopped outside 814, listened. Inside were voices. Fran's voice. "Joe, you're nuts. Just plain nuts."

The voice of Joe Wilks answered. "But I tell you they're after me. They've found me. Lou'll kill me. I tell you, Fran, he'll kill me."

"What makes you think he's found you? Joe, you're nuts."

"But I tell you he has found me. I can feel it. Nuts or not, I'm getting out of here. Let go of me, Fran. Let go of me, I say."

Followed a rip and a thump and Fran's angry voice. "Joe, damn you—" The door was snatched open. Joe Wilks stood in front of them.

"Hello, Joe," Lou said.

The tone was pleasant enough except for a cutting edge. But that cutting edge lifted the hackles of fear on the back of Aldrich's neck. Lou's voice cut like a knife. Lou moved toward Joe.

The little gambler in the loud suit backed away. Terror was stamped on his face, such fear as Aldrich had never seen or had known could exist. Joe Wilks seemed to sense seething currents of death somewhere inside of Lou. Joe bleated once, a cry like a rabbit suddenly and unexpectedly snatched up in the strong jaws of a hidden wolf.

Turning, he ran across the room. Head-first, in mortal terror, in fear so great it reckoned neither costs nor consequences, he dived through the window.

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THERE was a crash as the window pane shattered. Lou's body hurtled through the broken glass vanished. Fran, Lou, Al, and Aldrich stood as if frozen. In the breeze suddenly blowing through the broken pane, the window curtain flapped. Aldrich felt himself listening, waiting. His heartbeat piled up inside his chest until he thought it was going to choke him. From far below came the soft tinkle of breaking glass as fragments of the window pane hit the hard pavement.

Aldrich waited still for the thump of something heavier than glass.

He kept right on waiting. He was holding his breath but he didn't know it.

The moment was unreal. In some way his senses seemed to be detach ing themselves from his body. He had the impression he was floating free that he was weightless and detached not only from his body but from reality. He pulled himself back to his sense impressions, waiting, waiting for the thump. Did a human body fall slower than glass? Somebody—Galileo or somebody—had demonstrated that all bodies fell at the same speed for the factor of air resistance. Glass might fall a little faster than a man because it had a lower air resist ance—but not this much faster. Aldrich, driven by compulsion deep witnin him, moved to the window.

He looked out.

Eight stories below, the street was a river of black asphalt. Over this black river the street lights threw a wan glow. There was no body sprawled in death on the black as phalt river, there was no body on the concrete sidewalk.

When it was built, this hotel had been considered fireproof. Consequently there were no fire escapes. The brick wall went straight down for eight stories. There were no awn-

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ings to catch a falling body.

Aldrich pulled his head back into the room. He moved purposefully toward the door. Lou looked thoughtfully at him and nodded. "That's right. You go down and stall the cops while I shake this dame loose from any of my dough that she still has."

Like Aldrich, Lou was assuming the body was down there somewhere.

Fran was making squawking noises as Aldrich went out the door. Down in the lobby the sleeping night clerk had awakened. He looked at Aldrich, a quick furtive glance, then turned his head away as if he didn't want to be called on to identify this man. Better for a night clerk to know nothing and to see nothing.

NERVOUS Face was moving toward the front door. He saw Aldrich and waited for the psychologist. "I heard glass fall," he said "Did somebody throw something up there?"

"Joe went out the window," Aldrich said.

"Huh!" Nervous Face shuddered. He didn't like this, a little bit. Maybe the cops wouldn't believe Joe had jumped. Maybe they would claim he had been pushed.

"Come on," Aldrich said. They went out the front door.

Aldrich was emotionally prepared to find a huddle of broken flesh somewhere outside. He hadn't been able to see it from upstairs but he was convinced it was out here. He started searching.

He found bits of broken glass on the sidewalk. But no body. No open manhole into which a body could have fallen, no sidewalk basement chute. And no body.

Aldrich was not emotionally prepared to find nothing. According to all the laws of nature he knew, when a man jumped out the window, you found him down below. But he didn't find Joe Wilks.

"Are you nuts or something?" Nervous Face asked.

"Very," Aldrich answered.

"Very which?"

"Very nuts and very something," Aldrich said. "Shut up, please. I want to think." With his own eyes, he had seen Joe Wilks jump. But the same eyes refused to report the existence of a body down below. No blood, no mess, no goo.

Lou and Al came out the front door of the hotel. Lou patted his pockets. "I shook eight thousand out of her," he said. "Cops here yet?" His eyes went along the sidewalk, seeking something he knew should be here. "Where is he? If we've got time before the cops show I'll take the rest of it off him."

"You have time, I think," Aldrich said. There was an odd twist to his voice. The gambler looked at him. "What do you mean, doc?"

Aldrich told him what he meant. "But I saw him jump!" Lou argued. His eyes went along the street, seeking the body that ought to be there. He looked up, searching—as Aldrich had done—for a fire escape or an awning that might have caught a falling body. 'This beats the hell out of me," he muttered. He jerked his head around to look quickly over his shoulder as if he sensed the presence of something close behind him. But nothing was there. Aldrich felt his flesh crawl with cold.

"Let's get out of here," Lou said. They followed him to the waiting car.

LOU UNLOCKED the door of his private office and started to enter. Aldrich, following behind him, bumped into the gambler as Lou stopped suddenly. Looking over Lou's

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shoulder, Aldrich saw why the gambler had stopped. The office was occupied. Sitting in Lou's swivel chair behind Lou's desk was—Joe Wilks.

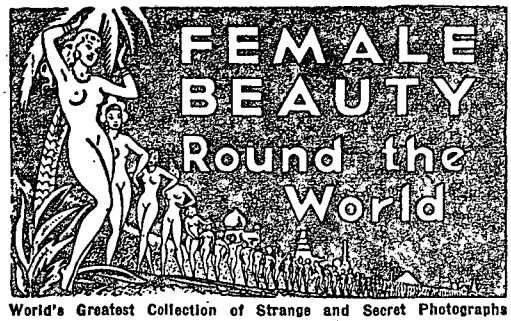
Standing with his back against the wall, his attention concentrated on an odd box-like device he was holding in both hands, was—the stranger. Sitting in the chair beside the desk was—Fran.

Aldrich's eyes went wonderingly over Fran and Joe and came to rest on the stranger. His skin was brown, he looked like a slender athlete dressed for tennis or some other similiar sport. He seemed to be a young man but there was about him an impression that he was far older than he seemed. A man of sixty wearing the body of a twenty-year old youth—this was the impression Aldrich got.

The stranger looked up as the door opened, his eyes swept the group standing in the doorway, the ghost of a pleasant smile passed across his face, then his gaze went back with worried intensity to the box he was holding.

A sound was coming from this box, a thin high note as clear as the tone from a crystal bell. The note seemed to come and go as if the frequency was changing in regular fluctation. Now it was within the range of the human ear, now it was gone into some higher frequency. Mingled with the tone was the soft continuous rustle of gently tearing silk.

Aldrich's gaze left the stranger, came back to Joe and Fran. He saw that they had changed. For one thing, their clothes were different. They were now dressed as the stranger was dressed, in shorts and soft shoes. Joe's checkered suit, Fran's dress that had revealed every curve of her body and had been a clever trap luring the eyes and the minds of men, these were gone. Gone was the pastiness from Joe's skin, it was now a



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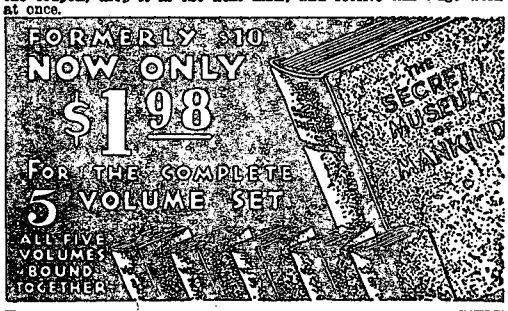

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deep golden brown, like the skin of an athlete who has been much in the sun. Fran's lip-stick and make-up, the darkened eye-lids, the plucked eye-brows, were gone.

But the changes in them went deeper than clothing. Something had been changed inside of them and the fact looked out from their eyes—as a deep, calm contentment. Aldrich had the impression that exceedingly clever mind surgeons had worked on Fran and Joe to produce this result. Contentment! They had probably never known the meaning of the word. Until now.

At the sight of Joe and Fran sitting at the desk, Aldrich took a firm grip on his sanity. Less than an hour before, he had seen this man jump from a hotel window and this woman, presumably, was still at the hotel. Now both were here. From the way they looked, the changed clothes, the deep inner contentment, both had been gone a long time. Aldrich didn't let himself think *where* they had gone, he restricted himself to the time involved. He thought, dazedly, that time was out of joint again. Not enough time had passed to allow the changes to take place in Fran and Joe. Yet the changes had taken place. Either that or illusion was involved. But how could he know for sure?

Deep in his mind he was aware of an old longing coming again to the surface. "If I could only be sure!" Was this illusion? Were his eyes lying to him? They lied, he knew, but were they lying now?

Aldrich was aware of a dazed whisper behind him. "Ghosts!" That was Al whispering. The thug's mind instantly rationalized the evidence of his eyes in the only way possible to it. Al wheezed once, then came the sound of heavy footsteps. But Al didn't scream until he reached the outer door and then he screamed only because he and Nervous Face, each trying to go first through the door, got in the way of each other. Each thought a ghost had grabbed him and each screamed, sounds torn from human throats in mortal terror. They fought their way through the door and were gone.

LOU DIDN'T move. He stood in the door staring into the office. Aldrich admired the chilled-steel nerves of the gambler. Coming face to face with this situation many men would have been turned into screaming idiots. But Lou was tougher than that. He must have suffered shock sufficient to distort part of his reasoning faculties or he would not have drawn his gun. But draw the gun he did. And stepped into his office.

"Hi, Joe," he said.

Politely Joe got to his feet. "Hello, Lou," he said. "Come in, Lou. I—" His voice faltered. "I brought your money back." He pointed toward the top of the desk.

Aldrich saw the money now, for the first time. It was arranged in neat piles on the desk top. Lou looked at it. For a split second, he hesitated. Then he nodded, as if everything was all right, now that he had his money. Scooping up the piles of paper, he thrust them into his pocket. "Why, thanks, Joe," he said. He stepped back from the desk—and crumpled like an empty sack, like an over inflated inner tube that has suddenly been slashed open by a razor-sharp knife.

Joe, concern on his face, started around the desk toward Lou. Silk ripped in the room and the bell-note frequency altered. The stranger spoke quickly, a single word. Joe stood stock still. He looked hopefully toward Aldrich.

"Take care of him, please. I—I can't step outside the transition field." He moved back to the swivel

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chair. The sound of tearing silk muted and the bell-note resumed its even rhythm.

Aldrich, sweating, bent over the gambler. He straightened up. "Just fainted," he said. "Smart. he's smart." He looked down at the prostrate Lou. "Now's the time to faint."

"I guess seeing us was a shock," Joe said.

"I guess it was," Aldrich repeated. "I saw you jump." He looked accusingly at Joe.

"Oh," Joe said, as if he had just remembered something that had happened and which had been important, once, but was no longer important. "Yes, you were with Lou at the hotel, weren't you?"

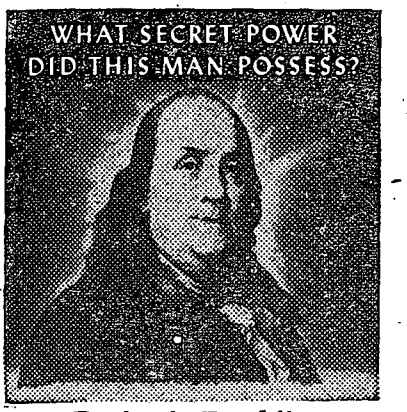
"I was," Aldrich said. "You jumped but you didn't land."

Joe nodded. His face said he knew how Aldrich felt and he was sorry. "I didn't land on the street," he said. "I landed eight thousand years in the future."

"What?" Aldrich said.

"You already know something about it, if you will stop to think. Pre-cognition involves the factor of time. When I jumped I was too scared to think. I could feel Lou thinking what he was going to do to me, which scared me half out of my mind. But the instant I jumped I knew I was going to die unless I did something. I thought of the funny feeling that had come over me after you worked on me. Now I know that funny feeling was the functioning of the psi ability but I didnt know it then. And I realized I didn't have to land on the street below but I could land in the future if I wanted to. I wanted to! I've been eight thousand years in the future for the past three months—"

"Three months?" Aldrich gasped. He realized that pre-cognition did actually involve a time factor but



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even if Joe had jumped eight thousand years into the future, how could he have been there for three months? To Aldrich's certain knowledge, Joe had been gone for less than an hour.

"When we set up the transition field and came back, we aimed at the next hour after I jumped. I didn't want to reach an earlier time; otherwise there would have been two of me here, although the *me* from the future would have been unstable and would move forward instantly if I got outside the transition field. But —time has passed for me. It hasn't passed for you, yet."

ALDRICH nodded, telling himself he understood. He knew that part of his difficulty in understanding resulted from Joe's effort to put into words mental concepts for which no words have been invented. Judging from the changes, Joe had certainly been gone for longer than an hour. Not only had changes taken place in his body but he seemed to have become educated, he used words now that the old Joe would not have used and he grasped concepts that the old Joe could never have understood. And the changes in Fran were equally great. Aldrich remembered how she had looked here in this office. A gun in her hand, she had been a wild beast ready to shoot. Now the wildness of unsatisfied longings was gone from her and she looked like—a happy woman. Time would certainly have been needed to accomplish this change! But—

"Why did you come back?" Aldrich asked.

Joe hesitated, as if this was even more difficult to explain. For this question involved the subtlety of motive. If you found yourself eight thousand years in the future, why would you come back to a day that was dead and gone? Why would you leave a world where so much that you wanted to know was known? Aldrich couldn't understand.

"I am being treated by very wise doctors," Joe said, slowly. "Part of their treatment involves what they call the working through of all guilt feelings. I had taken money from Lou and I felt guilty because of it. Even the doctors could not absolve my feeling of guilt. The only way it could be absolved was by returning the money to Lou. And that is why I came back."

"I see," Aldrich said. Guilt feelings properly belonged to the field of psychiatry but he knew enough about them to know how important they were. In this case, they were important enough to bring Joe Wilks back through time. Perhaps—silk suddenly rustled in the room and the crystal note wavered. The stranger spoke, sharply.

Joe's face showed alarm. "So long, friend," he said to Aldrich. "The field that holds us here is unstable and difficult to control. Fran and I have to go. So—goodbye. We'll see you tomorrow."

It was the casual parting of friends.

"Wait!" Aldrich shouted.

"What do you want?" Joe asked.

What did he want? Aldrich didn't know, for sure, but he knew that he wanted many things. The peace of mind, the deep inner serenity that Joe and Fran had, these he wanted. But there was something else he wanted even more—the knowledge of the future.

All his life had been devoted to a search for knowledge, for one grain of sand that he could call his own, one sure and certain fact.

"Please," he begged. "Take me with you."

In that future world, beyond this vast horizon, were oceans of sand. "Take me, too," he whispered.

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Joe stared at him in surprise. "Take you with us?" he parroted. "Why, doc, how can we do that? You are already there—with us?"

"What?" Aldrich whispered.

Joe nodded. "Sure you are, doc. Fran—Fran, doc—"

He was trying to explain. Crystal notes flooded through the room and a gigantic piece of silk was ripping. Against the wall the stranger was feverishly manipulating the controls on the box he held, striving to regain a balance precariously achieved, striving—and failing.

Fran, on her feet, moved to Joe's side. They went away. They went in a manner that hurt Aldrich's eyes to follow. They seemed to shrink in upon themselves, to grow small. For a split second of time Aldrich thought he could see two doll-like figures hanging in the air. Joe and Fran! Then they were gone.

Against the wall the stranger sought for control of the balance.

Aldrich turned to him. "Please..." His whole heart was in that single word. He had no control over this situation, no way to force the stranger to heed him. He could only ask, pray, and hope that his prayer might be answered.

"The field collapses, I must go," the stranger said. He smiled, yard after yard of silken fabric ripped, the stranger was a tiny doll hanging inexplicably in the air, then he was gone....

ALDRICH was alone in the office with only the unconscious Lou for company.

"They said I was there," he whispered. "They said it....they said it...."

Had Joe lied? Somehow it seemed to Aldrich that Joe was no longer capable of lying, that those doctors of the future had washed all deceit,

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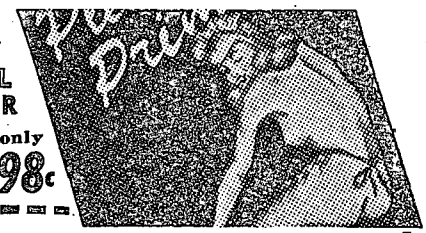

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all fraud, and all pretense out of the little gambler. And Joe had said, "We'll see you tomorrow...." the way one says goodbye to a good friend, fully expecting to see him in the morning. Or the next day. Joe had said he was there.

But he knew he was here. Joe and Fran were there—Fran? How did it happen that Fran was with Joe?

As the question—and its possible answer—came to him, he ran from the gambling house, ran gibbering along the street searching for a taxi. When he found a cab, he gave the driver the address of the hotel from which Joe had jumped. What if Fran was no longer in the hotel? At the thought, he urged the driver to break all speed laws.

She was still there, in the same room, afraid to leave. Scared half to death, sullen, suspicious, she finally admitted him. "I just want to stay near you," he begged. This was the old Fran. "Just to stay near you until—"

"What is this, a proposition?"

"No, no. Just let me stay. It won't be long. It can't be..."

"What the hell are you talking about, doc?" Yes, this was the old Fran all right. Her dress was still torn, where Lou's men had worked on her. In addition, she had a bruise on her face, apparently a parting gift from Lou.

"Just let me stay," he pleaded. "Don't ask questions. Just let me stay."

She finally agreed.

The sun was peeping through the broken window when the bells began to ring. Like elfin music from fairyland, they swept through that dingy hotel room, wild clear sweet notes. Silk rustled and began to tear as if the subtle fabric of space itself was being ripped. Then Joe was there in the room, a grinning Joe, and a stranger.

"Come on, Fran," Joe said. "We're going, baby."

To Aldrich he said, "I see you figured it out, doc. Since Fran was with me, all you had to do was stay with her until I came."

"I finally grasped it," Aldrich said.

He was grinning as the room swept away from him, vanishing before his eyes like smoke stirred by the pressure of a moving wind blowing along some vast horizon. Then a new world of sweeping distances, of far-off mountain and plain, of green meadows and rising uplands, appeared before his bemused gaze. This was it, this was the world he sought—the promised land.

FANTASTIC FACTS

★ By LEE OWENS ★

FANTASY IN BALLET

ANYONE at all familiar with fantasy knows that one of the most prolific sources of fantastic material is the ballet itself. So many dances are basically fantasies set to the graceful poetry of music and motion, that a fantasy fan can have a good time at the ballet whether he is interested in music and the dance or not.

While the conventional ballet repertory is full of such fantasies, the most splendid example to be seen is a recently issued British film called "The Red Shoes."

It is recommended strongly to every lover of fantasy. It is a magnificent poem of fantasy, set in a breath-taking riot of color and sound. Its plot revolves around the story of a girl who loved a pair of shoes which caused their wearer to dance beauti-

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fully—and interminably. She finally acquires these shoes, which eventually cause her to dance until she dies of sheer satiation and exhaustion.

The main plot of the film is also based on this ballet which in turn is based on a fairy tale of Hans Christian Anderson. Thus there is a plot within a plot.

Many other ballet films have produced beautiful fantasies. It is a rich field well worthy of study by the serious student of fantasy. A few years back a ballet was produced which is still being played often and which will probably become a part of the standard repertory. It is called "Undertow."

This ballet is a Freudian analysis in a way. It illustrates so expressively as only the dance can, what goes on within the complex, warped and distorted minds of people. It is a beautiful and yet at the same time, a hideous thing—like so many phases of fantasy.

In speaking of fantasy in the ballet and so strongly stressing the film aspects of it, we are reminded of a film which has nothing to do with the ballet but which is undoubtedly the greatest horror-fantasy every put on celluloid. We refer to the original—not the second film—"The Phantom Of The Opera." This famous classic of a film, made with Lon Chaney Sr., is considered by cinema critics as a great piece of art and above all it is entertaining beyond compare.

This film is often shone to students of art, and if it is ever possible for you to see it, make every effort to do so for it ranks with "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," "M", and other early film greats. We guarantee that after seeing the sheer suspense and horror of this original "Phantom" you will laugh at all other efforts so many of which do not compare favorably.

★ ★ ★

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SCIENCE-FICTION fans in particular and most people in general take the miraculous electrical and mechanical advancements of our day in their stride without thinking twice about them. They all know that as time goes on this is rapidly becoming a "push-button world." But the vast majority take the attitude that they'll have to wait quite a while before the advances affect them.

This is not so. A lot of other people, people usually with a little more mechanical interest are going right ahead and making their "push-button world" right now—right here and now. We are so fortunate in having all the "makings" right at hand too.

You don't hear much about it in the papers, but there are literally thousands and thousands of people—and we exclude the well known scientific amateurs like "hams", amateur telescope and so on—who have taken matters into their own hands

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and have gone ahead bringing this push-button world right into their homes.

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We chose the automatic garage doors as an example for no particular reason—the principles apply as well to things ranging from TV sets to building new homes. There are plenty of Americans with the energy and industriousness to go out and build the things they want.

The author has a line which he frequently quotes and which in its own way is a measure of the good and power of the United States, a line which tells more about the United States than a ream of historical papers. The line is this: "Just think! In this wonderful country anybody can buy a quarter horsepower electric motor for less than ten dollars!" Where else in the world can that be done?

So if you've got any ideas, any desires for the products of our civilization, even if it's as remote to you as a new car, there is an answer for you—get out and make it yourself—it can be done if you'll put your mind to it—plus a little work!

★ ★ ★

STAIRWAY TO LUNA

THE ARMY'S announcement of the high altitude record with the two-stage step-rocket is the first example of what we're going to see a lot of. Science-fictionists have been talking about step-rockets for years. Now they're seeing them in action.

The problem is this; we want to shoot a projectile to the Moon. When it hits—it's unmanned—it'll send out a signal, radio or visual as in the blasting off of a pile of flash powder. But no rocket will go to the Moon because it can't carry enough fuel. Futhermore the fuels we have aren't powerful enough. Therefore we have to

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shoot the rocket as a simple projectile with a terrific kick. We know what this kick must be theoretically. For a simple pulsed projectile to reach the Moon it must take off with a velocity of about seven miles per second.

Since no one rocket will do this, the only answer lies in building a two or three stage rocket which simply means that two or three rockets are fitted one in the other. Obviously they are fired then in sequence. And it is a simply physical fact that velocities are additive. So the first takes off, builds up a high speed—then fires the second—which then fires the third. By the time the thing has really gotten going, the third or last rocket is travelling at a terrific speed—even seven miles per second!

While the Army hasn't talked yet, it is evident that this must be its intention. The original combination of a V-2 with a Wac Corporal, while it attained only a height of two hundred and fifty miles, isn't a bad starter. Imagine what will happen when they start from scratch—and it is rumored that new fuels are coming into the picture. Already it has been suggested that liquid hydrogen has been tamed.

This magazine has beaten the drums for rocketry long before there were any V-2's, and it's going to continue hammering away at the idea of getting to the Moon. After all, it's the first step to making Man independent of his Earthly base.

Anyone can guess what will happen when we finally do conquer our satellite. It may be bad or good. Like so many recent developments of science, their potentialities for both evil and good are gigantic—and we're not sure yet which will be chosen. Regardless, calm, dispassionate scientists go ahead with their plans.

The Moon may become a stepping-stone to the planets, it may become a source of minerals, it may become an astronomical observatory—or it may become a dreaded base for launching projectiles at its Mother, the Earth. This last possibility, you may be sure, is being seriously toyed with by all the major powers, including our own government. All we can do is hope and pray that the latter never happens. It's a-lot easier throwing rocks from the top of an apartment building to the ground than vice versa. Who ever thought we'd even be considering this possibility a mere five or ten years ago?

★ ★ ★

QUEER QUANTUM

IT IS RARELY realized by the layman that certain phases of physics are a lot more important than the ones best known. Thus, the atomic bomb, relativity, and radar are as well known to the average man as his own name. But quantum mechanics, which is the basis of all these things is a remote, little-understood, foundation post of all three.

David Laurence, the noted popularizer of

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science, reporter for the New York Times and one of the best informed, scientifically, layman of our times, tells of an anecdote to illustrate his point.

He once, long before the war, attended a lecture given by that then little known theoretical physicist, Oppenheimer. Oppie's talk was on quantum mechanics, mysterious and erudite, laden with mathematical symbology and very, very abstruse. After the lecture, a number of laymen in the audience which was composed mainly of scientists, asked Oppie to explain what he was talking about. It was too mathematical they claimed. In almost a fit of pique, Oppenheimer explained that quantum mechanics can't be expressed in anything but mathematical symbols and expressions and there was no point in trying to understand it in any other way.

David Laurence then entered the conversation. He began by formulating certain ideas he had gotten from the lecture and then asking Oppie if his straight-forward explanations were correct. This went on for quite a while, all the time during which Oppie nodded agreement. When David Laurence had finished Oppie shook his hand. "I'm amazed," he admitted, "at the fact that you've succeeded so well in picturing so abstruse a subject."

As everyone has since learned, the popularization of science requires a peculiar temperament. A man who can understand the mathematics and the language of science, and yet who can paraphrase it into ordinary expressions is the required type. And David Laurence is a foremost example of this.

In a recent article in the New York Times, Laurence cries out against the fact that most newspapers give science the coverage of a sunday school picnic, not realizing that scientific news is the biggest and most important of all. This has changed somewhat with the public's awareness of the atomic bomb, rockets, radar, new medical drugs and so on. But still science is treated properly by the average newspaper.

Gradually this is changing. A simple idiotic murder story will occupy headlines, where an astounding revelation in basic science will be given a quarter column. The day the bomb fell on Hiroshima changed this considerably and forced editors to realize something that has existed long before them—science. Many magazines and newspapers, especially *Amazing* and *Fantastic* give an excellent coverage of these basic reports. After all, when the first rocket hits the moon, *Amazing Stories* will be living out its predictions—and it won't be long!

★ ★ ★

METEOR DUCKING

THE TIME is coming close, when men are going to start worrying about a problem which hitherto they've considered in a rather academic way. Men are going to go out into space in rocket-propelled

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spacecraft. Facing them will be numerous problems, ranging from radiation troubles to possible boredom. The problem that seems to require the most thought immediately is meteor-dodging.

We know the distribution roughly of the amount of meteoric matter surrounding the Earth, and the likelihood of a spaceship being struck by this debris ranging in size from a pinhead to a football. That chance is exceedingly remote. Space is so vast, meteoric matter is so slight, that collision between ship and matter is infinitesimally small. Never the less, it could happen.

When it is remembered that these meteoric particles are traveling with velocities far above those of rifle bullets. it is evident that shielding is simply out—nothing aboard the craft would be dense or massive enough to stop such projectiles. Consequently men must take the chance that their bodies will not intercept meteors even though the ship does It is purely a matter of chance and nothing can be done about it. What about the ship itself?

Since no deflecting mechanism is likely to be invented for a long time to come, at least one with sufficient ability to move a large rocket in a small space of time, the only thing we can expect to do, is to plug the holes dug into the rocket in order to prevent the loss of air.

This should not prove to be too difficult, if the meteor does not gouge too large a hole—and it is unlikely that any but a very few will be large enough to do that. Thus it appears that the interior of the space ship should be provided with some sort of self-sealing material, much like a self-sealing gas tank. which will close up immediately after being opened, reducing the blast of air outward to a mere trickle. After impact, more permanent repairs may be made.

The hazards of space flight, great as they are, can and will be conquered. In fact, this meteor-hazard must be treated in the same light that any dangerous undertaking is. We realize there is a percentage error of getting killed when driving a car, or a plane. or a submarine. Yet we do it. because we are willing to accept that chance.

Similarly we will accept the danger of space flight. As in an airplane flight we know we may crash. All right. then, we'll accept that risk and hope for the best. This fatalism is not that of the fool—this is calculated reasonability.

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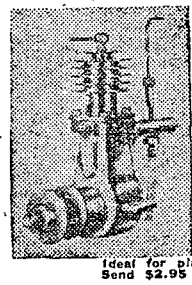

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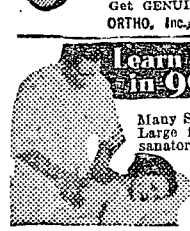

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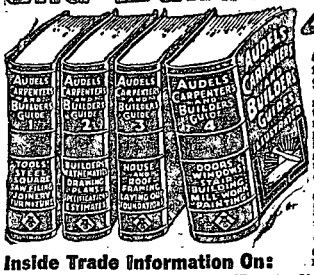

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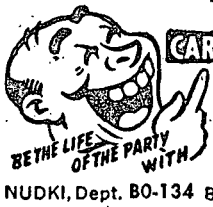

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of oddities with no logical basis whatsoever. Just consider French, German or Italian with their host of verb endings, with their perculiar archaic gender system and other remnants of idiocy. English has gotten away from this, but it has many faults of its own.

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★ ★ ★

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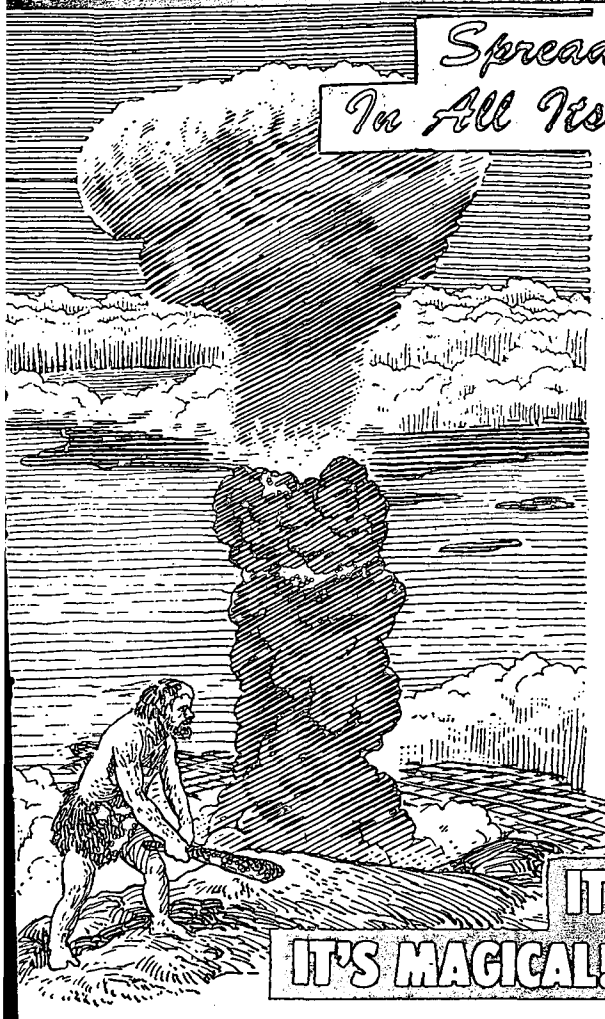

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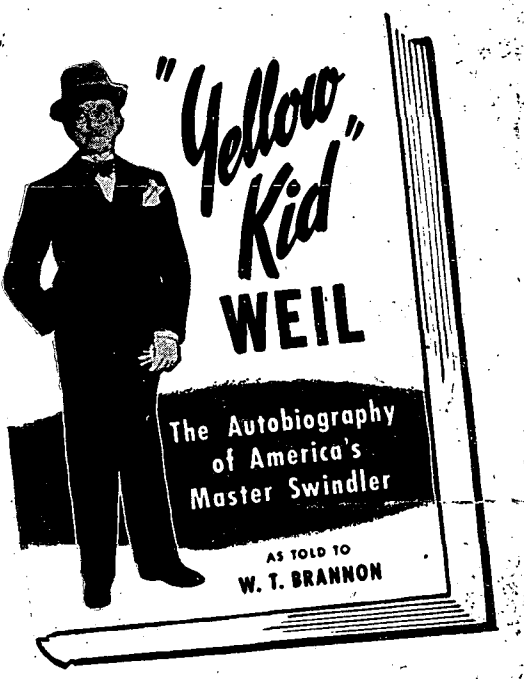

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